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POETIC INTERPRETATION OF NATURE.

ON

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BY

J. C. SHAIRP, LL. D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE UNITED COLLEGE OF ST. SALVATOR AND ST. LEONARD, ST. ANDREWS.

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PRINCIPAL OF THE UNITED COLLEGE OF ST. SALVATOR AND ST. LEONARD, ST. ANDREWS.

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PREFACE.

THIS small book is the result of some lectures which I had occasion to give to a large popular audience more than a year ago. I have since re-written and re-cast them into their present shape. Yet the book still bears the impress of the peculiar object with which the lectures were composed, and of the circumstances under which they were delivered. That object was to add a kind of literary supplement to several longer and more systematic courses of lectures on physical subjects, such as Chemistry, Geology, and Physiology, which were delivered at the same time by Professors who are my colleagues in this College. It seemed to me that some good might be done, if I could succeed in bringing before our hearers the truth that, while the several physical sciences explain each some portion of Nature's mysteries, or Nature considered under one special aspect, yet that after all the physical sciences have said their say, and given their expla-

nations, there remains more behind — another aspect of Nature — a further truth regarding it, with which, real and interesting though it is, Science does not intermeddle. The truth on which especially I wished to fix attention is the relation which exists between Nature and the sensitive and imaginative soul of man, and the result or creation which arises from the meeting of these two. That is a true and genuine result, which it does not fall within the province of Science to investigate, but which it is one peculiar function of Poetry to seize, and, as far as may be, to interpret. That the beauty which looks from the whole face of Nature, and is interwoven with every fibre of it, is not the less, because it requires a living soul for its existence, as real a truth as the gravitation of the earth's particles or the composition of its materials, — that careful noting and familiar knowledge of this beauty reveals a new aspect of the world, which will amply repay the observer, — and that the Poets are, in a special way, kindlers of sensibility, teachers who make us observe more carefully, and feel more keenly the wonders that are around us: these are some of the truths which I wished to bring before my hearers, and which, if I could in any measure succeed in doing so, would, I felt sure, not be without mental benefit.

As the audience whom I addressed consisted mainly of young persons whose chief employments lay elsewhere than in libraries, I felt that I had no right to reckon on any wide acquaintance with English literature. This will account for the occurrence in the later chapters of many well-known passages of English Poetry, which to persons at all conversant with letters may seem too familiar even for quotation. If, however, the passages quoted served to illustrate the views I wished to impress, I was not desirous to travel beyond well-worn paths.

In treating of a subject which has in recent years engaged the thoughts of many distinguished men, it could not but be that I should often come across and use the thoughts of others. No doubt it is not easy always to discriminate between thoughts that have risen spontaneously to one's own mind, and those which have been suggested by other writers. Whenever I have been aware that I was using thoughts not my own, I have tried to make due acknowledgment of this in the text. At the same time I would wish to acknowledge here more expressly how much I am conscious of obligation to three living writers, — to Canon Mozley of Oxford, for suggestions received from his sermon on "Nature," and incorporated

in my chapter on "the mystical side of Nature;" to Mr. Stopford Brooke for suggestive generalizations contained in his "Theology in the English Poets;" and to Mr. Leslie Stephen for some true and new thoughts in his recent Essay on Wordsworth's Ethics; some thoughts derived from the two latter writers I have tried to interweave into the last chapter of my book.

As to the book itself, I am well aware how small a portion of how vast a subject it has even attempted to deal with. But, as the original lectures were written, so this book is meant, mainly for the young. If, however, it should induce any of these to look on the outward world with more heedful and thoughtful eyes, and to win thence for themselves finer observations, and deeper delight, it will have served a good end.

St. Salvator's College, St. Andrews,
June 12, 1877.

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THE

POETIC INTERPRETATION OF NATURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOURCES OF POETRY.

POETRY, we are often told, has two great objects with which it deals, two substances out of which alone it weaves its many-colored fabric — Man and Nature. Yet such a statement seems hardly adequate. For is there not in all high Poetry, whether it deals with Nature or with Man, continual reference, now latent, now expressed, to something which is beyond and above both? This reference has taken many shapes, and uttered itself in many ways, according to the belief and civilization of each age and country. But by whatever mists and obstructions it has been colored and refracted, it has never been wholly absent from true Poetry, and has been working itself clearer, and making itself more powerfully felt, as the world grows older. The Higher Life encompassing the life both of Man and of Nature; the deeper Foundation on which both ultimately

repose; the omnipresent Power which binds both together, and makes them work in unison toward some further end, — this has been a truth ever present in the highest Poetry, to which great Poets have always witnessed. Therefore, even in the most summary view of the domain of Poetry, we must not omit this invisible but most powerful element. To express it clearly, we must say that Poetry has three objects, which in varying degrees enter into it, — Man, Nature, and God. The presence of this last pervades all great Poetry, whether it lifts an eye of reverence directly towards Himself, or whether the presence be only indirectly felt, as the centre to which all deep thoughts about Man and Nature ultimately tend. Regarded in this view, the field over which Poetry ranges becomes coextensive with the domain of Philosophy, and indeed of Theology. Dissimilar, often opposed, as is the procedure of Poetry, of Philosophy, and of Theology, different as are the faculties which each calls into play, and the mode in which these faculties deal with their objects, yet the hinges on which all alike turn, the cardinal conceptions on which their eye is fixed, are fundamentally the same. While Philosophy and Theology, in their striving to attain distinct conceptions, are forced to deal with these great ideas separately, and to keep them systematically apart, Poetry, on the other hand, under the fusing and blending power of imagination, is, in its highest mood, pervaded by a continual reference to

all the three at once, and will at times combine and flash them all at once upon the soul in one inspired line.)

It is, however, of only one of these three main objects of Poetry that I now propose to treat — the action of Poetry on external Nature, the way in which the poets deal with the outward world. In doing this it will appear at a glance, and will become more clear in the sequel, that it is impossible to isolate this one aspect of Poetry; that, even when the poet's regards are mainly turned toward the outward world, the sense of God and of man is not far away. But even when we do our best to limit the subject as far as may be, it is so vast in itself and in its ramifications, that, far from hoping to exhaust it in these few pages, I shall be well content if, when they are finished, it is found that a few avenues of thought have been opened up, a few glimpses obtained into truths which are real and suggestive.

Before going farther, let me say what I mean by Nature, for there is no word which more needs definition. There is none, except perhaps its counterpart, Reason, which is used in more various, often conflicting, meanings, or with more shades of meaning, each passing into the other. By Nature, then, I understand the whole sum of appearances which reach us; which are made known to us, primarily through the senses. It includes all the intimations we have through sense of that great entity which lies outside of

ourselves, but with which we have so much to do. For my present purpose I do not include Man, either his body or his mind, as part of Nature, but regard him rather as standing out from Nature, and surveying and using that great external entity which encompasses and confronts him at every turn, he being the contemplator, Nature the thing contemplated.

The same external Nature which Poetry works on supplies the staple or raw material with which all the Physical Sciences deal, and which they endeavor to reduce to exact knowledge, subduing apparent confusion and multiplicity into unity, law, and order. Each of the Physical Sciences attempts to explain the outward world in one of its aspects, to interpret it from one point of view. And the whole circle of the Physical Sciences, or Physical Science in its widest extent, confines itself to explaining the appearances of the material world by the properties of matter, and to reducing what is complex and manifold to the operation of a few simple but all-pervading laws. But besides those aspects of Nature which Physical Science explains, over and above those laws which the Sciences discover, there are other sides or aspects of Nature which come to us through other than scientific avenues, and which, when they do reach us, bring home to us new truth, and raise us to noble contemplations. This ordered array of material appearances, these marshaled lines of Nature's sequences, wonderful

and beautiful though they be, are not in themselves all. No reasonable being can rest in them. Inevitably he is carried out of and beyond these, to other inquiries which no Physics can answer: How stand these phenomena to the thinking mind and feeling heart which contemplates them? how came they to be as they are? are they there of themselves, or is there a Higher Centre from which they proceed? what is their origin? what the goal toward which they travel? Inquiries such as these, which are the genuine product of Reason, lead us for their answer, not to the Physics of the Universe, but to another order of thought, to Poetry, to Philosophy, and to Theology. And the light thrown from these regions on this marvelous outward framework, while it contradicts nothing in the body of truth which Science has made good, permeates the whole with a higher meaning, and transfigures it with a splendor which is Divine.

Philosophy and Theology we must for the present leave alone, and ask only what is that aspect of Nature, that truth of the External World, with which Poetry has more immediately to do. To put it in the simplest way: it is Beauty, that strange and wonderful entity with which all creation is clothed as with a garment, or rather I should say pervaded and penetrated as by a subtle essence, inwrought into its inmost fibre. The Poet is the man to whom is given the eye that sees this more instinctively, the

heart that feels it more intensely, than other men do; and who has the power to express it and bring it home to his fellow-men. But if I were to confine myself to this I should not be saying much. For the question would at once be asked, "Pray, what is Beauty?" And it might be further asked, "Is it not as much the business of the Painter as of the Poet to seize and express the visible beauty of which you speak?"

Any attempt to answer the first question, and to explain what is Beauty, would involve a long discussion, perhaps not a very profitable one. At any rate it would lead me far from my present purpose. This only may be said in passing. Light, as physicists inform us, is not something which exists in itself apart from any sentient being. The external reality is not light, but the motion of certain particles, which, when they impinge on the eye, and have been conveyed along the visual nerve to the brain, are felt by the mind as light, — result in the perception of light. Light, therefore, is not a purely objective thing, but is something produced by the meeting of certain outward motions with a perceiving mind. Again, certain vibrations of the air striking on the drum of the ear, and communicated by the nerve of hearing to the brain, result in the perception of sound. Sound, therefore, is not a purely objective entity, but is a result that requires to its production the meeting of an outward vibration with a hearing mind; it is the

result of the joint action of these two elements. In a similar way, certain qualities of outward objects, certain combinations of laws in the material world, when apprehended by the soul through its æsthetic and imaginative faculties, result in the perception of what we call Beauty. Therefore Beauty, neither wholly without us nor wholly within us, is a product resulting from the meeting of certain qualities of the outward world with a sensitive and imaginative soul. The combination of both of these elements is requisite to its existence. It is no merely mental or subjective thing, born of association, and depending on individual caprice, as the Scotch philosophers so long fancied. When the two elements necessary to the perception of it have met, it is a reality as inevitable and as veritable as the law of gravitation, or any law which science registers. And when, either through our own perception, or through the teaching of the poets, we learn to apprehend it — when it has found entrance into us, through eye and ear, imagination and emotion, we have learnt something more about the world in which we dwell than Physics have taught us, — a new truth of the material universe has reached us through the imagination, not through the scientific or logical faculty.

If, then, Beauty be a real quality interwoven into the essential texture of Creation, and if Poetry be the fittest human expression of the existence of this quality, it follows that Poetry

has to do with truth as really as Science has, though with a different order of truth. This is perhaps not the common view of the matter. An old Scotch gentleman I once knew, one of the most sagacious and wise of his generation, who, whenever anything was propounded which was more than usually extravagant and absurd, used to dismiss it with a wave of his hand, saying: "Oh, that is Poetry." Yet he was one who could see in the outlines of his native hills, and feel in all human relations, whatever was most beautiful. There are, I dare say, a good many sensible people who share my friend's view, to whom Poetry is only another name for what is fanciful, fantastic, unreal — only, as one called it, a convenient way of talking nonsense. To these I would say, If this be so, if Poetry be not true, if it have not a real foundation in the nature of things, if genuine Poetry be not as true a form of thinking as any other, indeed one of the highest forms of human thought, then I should not recommend any one to waste time on it, but to have done with it, and turn to more solid pursuits. It is because I have a quite opposite conviction, because I believe Poetry to have a true and noble place in this order of things, a place not made by the conceit of man, but intended by the Maker of this order, because I hold Poetry to be, what Wordsworth has called it, "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" — to be "immortal as the heart of man," it is because of these convictions that there

is claimed for it the serious regard of reasonable men, and that it seems worth our while to dwell for a little on one, though only one, aspect of this many-sided study.

The real nature and intrinsic truth of Poetry will be made more apparent, if we may turn aside for a moment to reflect on the essence of that state of mind which we call the poetic, the genesis of that creation which we call Poetry. Whenever any object of sense, or spectacle of the outer world, any truth of reason, or event of past history, any fact of human experience, any moral or spiritual reality; whenever, in short, any fact or object which the sense, or the intellect, or the soul, or the spirit of man can apprehend, comes home to one so as to touch him to the quick, to pierce him with a more than usual vividness and sense of reality, then is awakened that stirring of the imagination, that glow of emotion, in which Poetry is born. There is no truth cognizable by man which may not shape itself into Poetry. It matters not whether it be a vision of Nature's ongoings, or a conception of the understanding, or some human incident, or some truth of the affections, or some moral sentiment, or some glimpse into the spiritual world; any one of these may be so realized as to become fit subjects for poetic utterance. Only in order that it should be so, it is necessary that the object, whatever it is, should cease to be a merely sensible object, or a mere notion of the understanding, and pass inward, —

pass out of the coldness of the merely notional region into the warm atmosphere of the life-giving Imagination. Vitalized there, the truth shapes itself into living images which kindle the passion and affections, and stimulate the whole man. This is what has been called the real apprehension of truths, as opposed to the merely notional assent to them. There is no quality in which men more differ than in this intensity of mental nature, this power of vividly realizing whatever a man does lay hold of. It is an essential — indeed a primary — ingredient in the composition of the Poet; but is not confined to him. It is shared by all men who are powerful in any line of thought or action. This mental energy, this intensity of realizing power, is the stuff out of which are made all who in any way really move their fellow-men. It creates, as has been well said, "Heroes and saints, great leaders, statesmen, preachers, and reformers, the pioneers of discovery in science, visionaries, fanatics, knight-errants, and adventurers." In these and such like, the men of abounding energy, who have revolutionized states and moved the world, the process had begun with the vivid realization of some truth through the imagination; but it has not stopped there. It has gone on from the imagination to the affections. It has stirred the hopes, the fears, the loves, the hates of the soul, enkindling them and driving them with full force on the will, and propelling the man into action. In the Poet, on

the other hand, the process not only begins, but continues in the imagination, kindling, no doubt, a real glow of emotion, but not leading him, as poet, to any outward action, save the one action of giving vent to what he feels, of finding poetic expression for the vision with which his imagination is filled.

In this we see the distinction between the Poet and those other men of intense soul, who share with him the power of vivid apprehension, of making real through the imagination whatever truths they see at all. They carry that truth which they have imaginatively apprehended into the region of the passions and the will, and rest not till they have condensed it into outward action. He keeps the truths which he sees within the confines of imagination, and is impelled by his peculiar nature to seek a vehicle for it, not in action but in song, or in some other form of artistic expression. And hence the practical danger which besets the Poet, and indeed all æsthetic and literary men, of becoming unreal, if that truth which they see and cultivate for artistic purposes they never try to embody in any form of practical action, any common purpose with their fellow-men.

If then it be asked what are the proper objects of Poetry, what is the proper field for the exercise of the Poet's art, the answer, supposing what I have said to be true, is, the whole range of existence; wherever the sensations, thoughts, feelings

of man can travel, there the Poet may be at his side, and find material for his faculties to work on. The one condition of his working is, that the object pass out of the region of mere dry fact, or abstract notion, into the warm and breathing realm of imagination. What the mental process is by which objects cease to be mere dead facts, informations, and become imaged into living realities, I stay not to inquire. The whole philosophy of Imagination is a subject on which the metaphysicians have as yet said little that is helpful.

With regard to the working of Imagination and other so-called faculties, Philosophers, I rather think, have cut and carved our mental nature with too keen a knife. They have "murdered to dissect." Our books lay it down, for instance, as an axiom, that a definite act of the pure understanding must needs precede every movement of the affections, that we must form a distinct conception of a thing as pleasant before we can desire it, that we must first judge a character to be noble, before admiration of it can be awakened. I am not sure that this is the true account of the matter, am not convinced that the understanding unmixed with feeling, the pure intelligence untouched by sentiment, must first decide before the affections can be moved. Is it so clear that in all cases we can separate knowledge from affection? Is there not a large field of truth — namely, moral truths, in which we

cannot do so — into which the affections must actively enter before any judgment can be formed? For, as has been said,[1] "The affections themselves are a kind of understanding; we cannot understand without them. Affection is a part of insight; it is required to understand the facts of the case. The moral affections, *e. g.*, are the very instruments by which we intellectually apprehend good and high human character. All admiration is affection — the admiration of virtue, the admiration of nature. Affection itself then is a kind of intelligence, and we cannot separate the feeling in our nature from the reason. Feeling is necessary for comprehension, and we cannot know what a particular instance of goodness is, we cannot embrace the true conception of goodness in general, without it."

If this be true of moral apprehension, if in this intelligence and affection are so coincident, so interpenetrate each other, that we cannot say which is first, which last, where the one ends, the other begins, the same truth holds good in imaginative apprehension. Here, too, there is not first a cut-and-dry intellectual act, and then a succeeding emotion. From the first, in every act of the imagination, these two elements are present simultaneously; though it is true that in time the emotional element tends to grow stronger than the intellectual, sometimes even overpowers it. Imagination in its essence seems to be, from the

[1] *Quarterly Review*, October, 1870, pp. 143, 144.

first, intellect and feeling blended and interpenetrating each other. Thus it would seem that purely intellectual acts belong to the surface and outside of our nature, — as you pass onward to the depths, the more vital places of the soul, the intellectual, the emotional, and the moral elements are all equally at work, — and this in virtue of their greater reality, their more essential truth, their nearer contact with the centre of things. To this region belong all acts of high imagination — the region intermediate between pure understanding and moral affection, partaking of both elements, looking equally both ways.

But it is not with the philosophy of the process, but with the results that we have now to do. All men possess this power of vitalizing knowledge in some measure. The mental qualities which go to make the Poet have nothing exclusive or exceptional in them. They differ nothing in kind from those of other men — only in degree. As one well entitled to speak for the Poets has told us, — the Poet, the man of vivid soul shares the same interests, sympathies, feelings as other men, only he has them more intensely. "He is distinguished from other men, not by any peculiar gifts, but by greater promptness and intensity in thinking and feeling those things which other men think and feel, and by a greater power of expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him."[1]

[1] Wordsworth, Preface to Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

I have said that the range of Poetry is boundless as the universe. Whenever the soul comes into living contact with fact and truth, whenever it realizes these with more than common vividness, there arises a thrill of joy, a glow of emotion. And the expression of that thrill, that glow, is Poetry. The range of poetic emotion may thus be as wide as the range of human thought, as existence. It does not follow from this that all objects are alike fit to awaken poetry. The nobler the objects the nobler will be the poetry they awaken, when they fall on the heart of a true poet. But though this be so, yet poetry may be found springing up in the most unlikely places, among what seem the driest efforts of human thought, just as you may see the intense blue of the Alpine forget-me-not[1] lighting up the darkest crevices, or the most bare and inaccessible ledges of the mountain precipice.

In illustration of this, let me give an anecdote which I lately read in one of Canon Liddon's sermons in St. Paul's: — "Why do you sit up so late at night?" was a question put to an eminent mathematician. "To enjoy myself," was the reply. "But how can that be? I thought you spent your time in working out problems." "So I do, and that is my enjoyment," answered the mathematician. "Depend upon it," he added, "those lose a form of enjoyment too keen and sweet to be described, who do not know, after

[1] Myosotis Alpestris.

long effort, what is the joy of recognizing the agreement between two mathematical formulæ." If, in such moments of profound satisfaction, our mathematician had added to his other powers the power adequately to utter the joy of his "eureka," the expression of it would, no doubt, have been a high poem. "Poetry is the blossom and fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language," [1] or it is the fine wine that is served at the banquet of human life. And what is true of mathematical is still more true of other forms of truth. Whenever a soul comes into vivid contact with it, there springs up that emotion which is the essence of Poetry. And that this contact is so delightful, that all truth and the human soul are so akin, that when they recognize each other, the immediate result is this thrill of joy, this pure and high emotion, what does not this fact hint of the nature of the soul and its origin?

We now then say that as Physical Science explains the appearances of the material world solely by the properties of matter, and it is its business to do so, so Poetry seizes the relation of outward objects to the soul and expresses this, and it is its business to do so. Physical Science deals with the outward object alone. Poetry has to do with the object *plus* the soul of man. Or, to put it otherwise: from the meeting and combined action of these two forces, the outward ob-

[1] S. T. Coleridge, *Lit. Biog.* vol. ii. p. 23.

ject and the soul, there arises a creation, or emanation, different from either, but partaking of the nature of both. And it is the business of true poetry to express this. Any real object, vividly apprehended, we thus see, will awaken in an intelligent and emotional being a response which is the beginning of poetry. The depth and breadth and volume of that response will, of course, be proportioned to the nobility of the object which evokes it, and to the responsive capacity of the mind to which it makes its appeal. And if it be asked, How are we to estimate the nobility of any object? we may say that its measure will be the variety and strength and elevation of the emotions which it has the power of evoking in those spirits which are most finely touched. The deeper, the larger, the higher the object presented to a soul fitted to receive it, the greater will be the body of emotion with which that soul will respond to it, the finer will be the poetry which is the expression of that emotion.

All delight we know on earth arises, as the wise Bishop Butler has told us, "from a faculty having its proper object," and the perfection of happiness would consist "in all the faculties having found their full and adequate object." If then those partial objects, those shadows of perfection, which are the highest objects vouchsafed to us here, awaken in us a keen responsive thrill of emotion, whose fittest utterance is song, what shall it be for a human soul to be admitted to the

vision of Him "who alone is an object, an infinitely more than adequate object to our most exalted faculties — an adequate supply to all the capacities of our souls, a subject to the understanding, an object to the affections." In the contemplation of this truth long pondered, the deep heart of the philosophic Bishop breaks forth into a strain of meditation in which the conflict between intense feeling and his habitual self-restraint seems almost to overpower him. And what a view does this give of the essential permanence of Poetry, how in the essence it must be eternal as the soul of man! It seems to open a glimpse into the meaning of the mysterious imagery of the Apocalypse, and to hint how it will be that the joy of the Redeemed before the Throne can utter itself only in that new song which none can learn but they.

Thus far I have spoken only of the feeling or emotion which generates Poetry. Little or nothing has been said of that other side — the expression of the feeling in words. The mathematician of whom I have spoken was not, for all his joy, a poet. Why? Because though he had the material of poetry within him in the intense joy, he had not the power of putting it forth, of making it audible. He kept all the delight to himself, and could not by utterance impart it to others. He was at best but a dumb poet — a poet "in posse," not a poet "in esse," as the Schoolmen

speak. And the question arises, Is not a dumb Poet a contradiction in terms? is it not of the very essence of a poet that he should be vocal? Is it not in this, his power of voicing his emotion, rather than in his power of feeling it, that he is distinguished from common men? Here we come on a great controversy on which I shall not venture to dogmatize. Wordsworth, we all remember, held that

> "Many are the poets that are sown
> By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
> The vision and the faculty divine;
> Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse."

But Goethe and many others with him hold that without the power of poetic expression there can be no poet; that as well might you speak of a child being born which was a mind without a body, as of poetry existing in the soul which does not embody itself in language; that, if we are to divide Poetry into essence and expression, the garment of musical words is indeed the more essential of the two — or rather, that Poetry is non-existent till it has clothed itself in words; that in the true poet the emotion and the expression of it come into being at once, and are one. To this side Coleridge, I believe, would lean, for we find him saying — "The sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination, and . . . . may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned."

On the whole, then, without deciding whether

the essence of the poetic nature lies in the capacity of feeling the emotion, and brooding over the shaping thought, or in the power of projecting it in words, this may be said: — Even if the potential poet may be silent, the actual poet must add the power of embodying his emotion in melodious words. And this from no conventional artifice of literature; but because, before the existence of any literature, the natural expression of strong emotion is a chant, a song. There is an essential kinship between the waves of excited feeling within the breast, the heaving of the soul under the power of emotion, and a corresponding rhythmical cadence in the words which utter it. Song or chant and emotion are as intrinsically allied as word and thought. The poet is the man whose emotions, intenser than those of other men, naturally find a vent for themselves in some form of harmonious words, whether this be the form of metre or of balanced and musical prose. The rhythmical vibrations of his soul long to project themselves into some sonorous medium. And for poetry to lie as it does dead in our printed books, to be read merely by the eye, or, if uttered aloud, to be read as one would a newspaper, is as unnatural, as emptying to it of its meaning, as it is for the lovely wild-flower to be seen dried and colorless within the leaves of a herbarium. Not of lyrical poetry only, though of it preëminently, but of all high poetry, may it be said, that it is only then fitly uttered when it is chanted, not

read, and so it is with a chant that most poets have recited their own poetry. As Wordsworth tells us, "Though the accompaniment of a musical instrument be dispensed with, the true poet does not therefore abandon his privilege distinct from that of the mere proseman;

> "He murmurs near the running brooks,
> A music sweeter than their own."

It is a sad divorce that has long been made between poetry and song. We shall never know the full power of Poetry till she has wandered back to her original home, and found there her long-severed sister, Music. Only then, if they could find each other again, and come forth to the world in blended might, should we know the full compass of that marvelous creation which we call Poetry.

CHAPTER II.

THE POETIC FEELING AWAKENED BY THE WORLD OF NATURE.

If the view taken in the former chapter of the genesis of Poetry be true, if any existence keenly realized may awaken it, must not that material framework which encompasses us from the cradle to the grave enter most intimately into our earliest and most permanent feelings, and color all the poetry which expresses them? For are not the visible earth and skies the storehouse from which imagination furnishes herself with her earliest forms, and draws her broadest as well as most delicate resemblances? Are these not the substance round which the affections twine many of their first and finest tendrils? Next to the household faces, is not the visible world the earliest existence that we know, the last we lose sight of in our earthly sojourn? All his life long man is encompassed with it, and never gets beyond its reach. He lies an infant in the lap of Nature before he has awakened to any consciousness. When consciousness does awaken within him, the external world is the occasion of the awakening, the first thing he learns to know at

the same time that he learns his mother's look and his own existence. For the growing boy she is the homely nurse that, long before schools and school-masters intermeddle with him, feeds his mind with materials, pouring into him alike the outward framework of his thought and the colors that flush over the chambers of his imagery. The expressive countenance of this earth and of these heavens, glad or pensive, stern or dreary, sublime or homely, is looking in on his heart at every hour and mingling with his dreams. Nature is wooing his spirit in manifold and mysterious ways to elevate him with her vastness and sublimity, to gladden him with her beauty, to depress him with her bleakness, to restore him with her calm. This quick interchange of feeling between the world without and the world within, this vast range of sympathy, so subtle, so unceasing, so mysterious, is a fact as certain and as real as the flow of the tides or the motion of the earth. Yet, though truth it be, it is one which Science cannot recognize, and which she has left wholly to the poet. It is his to witness to the fact of this intimacy — kinship, I might say — between the movements of Nature and the heart of Man, to represent the relation and interpret it. And though he may never be able fully to compass or exhaust all the import of these relations, or to penetrate to the bottom of the secret, yet it is one chief office of the poet to express it, to get it recognized, to keep alive the sense of it

among his fellow-men, and to interpret to them, as best he may, those enduring yet tender intimacies that exist between their hearts and the wide world of eye and ear that surrounds him.

This mighty process of influencing man, not only through his corporeal needs, but in the more delicate recesses of the heart, the outward world, it is clear, must have been carrying on unremittingly since the earliest appearance of man on the earth. But what may have been the phases of it in primeval times, before history finds man, is a question I do not propose to enter on. No doubt, even in the most remote eras, when savage men dwelt naked in caves, or cowered in abject worship before the blind forces of Nature, and lived in terror of wild beasts, or of each other, even then there must have been moments when their hearts were imaginatively touched, as either the hurricane or the thunder awed them, or Nature looked on them more benignly through the sunset or the dawn. In that later stage, when the Aryan family had reached their mythologizing era, and owing to the weakness of their abstracting powers and the strength of untutored imagination, were weaving the appearances of earth and sky into their hierarchies of gods, Nature and Imagination were face to face, and and were all in all.

The other intellectual powers of man were as yet comparatively dormant. He had not yet learned consciously to disengage the thoughts of

himself and of God from the visible appearances in which they were still entangled. But to trace the movements of Imagination through that primeval time forms no part of my present task. Even without attempting this, there is more than enough to detain our thoughts, if we attempt to trace, even in outline, some of the ways in which the human and poetic imagination has worked on the outward world in that later stage when the three great entities, God, Man, and Nature, were in thought clearly distinguished. Though in studying our present subject it may be necessary for clearness's sake, in some measure to isolate Nature in thought from the other two great objects of contemplation, with which in reality it is so closely interwoven, we must never conceive of it as if it were really a separate and independent existence. However we may for a moment regard Nature by herself, we must not forget that in reality we can never contemplate it apart from the other two entities on which it depends; that Nature as mere isolated appearance, without a mind to contemplate and a power to support it, is meaningless; that all the three objects of knowledge coexist at every moment, interpenetrate and modify each other at every turn of thought; and that it is to the light reflected on Nature from the other two that she owes large part of her meaning, her tenderness, her suggestiveness, her sublimity.

The tendency to isolate Nature and to regard

it as a self-subsisting thing cut off from other existence, has been strong ever since man came to be clearly conscious of his own distinctness from the world. In this, as in every other realm of thought, progress is slow; it requires long ages to get to the right mental attitude. Among the ethnic races, at least, there were first the two periods already noticed — one in which man crouched in blind abject terror in presence of the elements; another marked by that brighter Nature-worship embodied in the Aryan mythology, which, though past its prime, was still surviving when the Homeric poems were composed. Then succeeded the time when, on the one hand, the mind of man separated itself from the world and asserted its distinct existence; and when, on the other, the thought of Deity, under the guidance of reflection and philosophy, gradually extracted itself from the visible appearances in which it had been so long imbedded.

When this great change had made itself felt, and when, at the same time, out-of-door life gave place to life in cities, Nature in a great measure lost its hold on man's regards, and retired into the background as a lifeless mechanical thing, without interest or beauty or any intimacy with man. The material world, indeed, had still its utilitarian value. It ministered to man's bodily wants in the thousand ways that immemorial usage handed down, and which science in recent times has so greatly multiplied. If the refreshing

presence of Nature still blended unawares with the animal spirits of men, and cheered them when they were weary, yet the multitudes cast on it no imaginative regards, and cared nothing for the poetry which mediates between the eye and the heart. This seems a true account of the mental attitude of the great civilized communities, down even to recent times. And, notwithstanding the great movement toward Nature which is said to characterize this modern era, one may well doubt whether the sentiment has really penetrated the hearts of even the most cultivated men. Such things must always be difficult to gauge. Yet one cannot but sometimes wonder, if from the modern love of Nature, and the much talk about it, there could be deducted all that may be set down to love of change, imitation, fashion, and the desire to meet the expectations of refined society, how much would remain of feeling that was native, genuine, and spontaneous.

A few, we may believe, there have been in every age, and more perhaps in this than in former ages, to whom, in spite of the prosaic atmosphere that surrounded them, Nature was something more than a dead machine, something even worthy of affection. Poets, too, were born from age to age, favorite children of

"Gaudentes rure Camœnæ,"

who had their hearts opened in a preëminent degree to receive the love of Nature themselves, and to awaken it in other hearts by the music

which they lent to it. Yet neither the poets, nor the few apprehensive spirits who sympathized with them, could do much to make head against the prosaic ways of thinking by which they were surrounded. It was only with furtive and occasional glances that even the poets of past ages were allowed to look at Nature as they would, only by a kind of sufferance that they were allowed to express the tender love they felt for her. The feelings which they had in her presence were put down to imagination, which was a faculty of falsehood, and the words which they used regarding her were supposed to be tropes and hyperboles that had no meaning. The science and the philosophy, as well as the common belief which surrounded them, had settled it, that Nature was as inanimate as any piece of man's manufacture. And what were a few poets, with their weak singing, a few dreamers, with their flimsy fancies, that they could withstand the tyrant tradition, even though, half unconsciously, all their highest inspiration witnessed against it? The instinctive faith of the poet cannot be vindicated till, not in Poetry only, but by Science and Philosphy also, the unity and the life that is in Nature are fully recognized, — till the whole visible world, not in trope and figure, but in literal truth, is felt to be the embodied thought of a mind which is in Nature and above it, and which fills the Universe. Not till this conviction has come home to man as a sober truth of reason, can we feel that Nature

is intended to minister no furtive, but a legitimate delight to the eye, to furnish an interest to the understanding, beauty and suggestiveness to the imagination, calm and restoration to the heart. Otherwise she becomes, none the less for all her beauty, to those who fain would love her, a cruel and all-devouring Sphinx.

Not, however, that the poet busies himself with the question as to the essential nature of the material world, or inquires whether there can be found in matter any ultimate and permanent element. The analytic scrutiny of appearances is no part of his concern; this he willingly leaves to the physicist and the metaphysician to settle between them. Whether matter be ultimately resolvable into indestructible atoms out of which all visible forms are composed, or whether all that impinges on our senses be not at bottom one only force manifesting itself in infinite change, or whether in the last resort matter may be only "a permanent possibility of sensation," or whether all force may not be regarded as the direct and immediate action of the Divine Will, — all these are questions with which, as poet, he does not intermeddle, though his knowledge that such questions can be asked may quicken his sense of the mystery of Creation which he contemplates. When poets have ventured to make such abstract questions the subject of their poetry, they have not generally succeeded. The poetic strength of Lucretius is not seen in

his expositions, able though they are, of the atomic philosophy, but in his vivid representation of the manifold appearances of Nature, and in his broad and profound sense of the one universal life that pervades them all. The poet is in his proper place, not when he scrutinizes nature as an analyst, but when he unreservedly accepts all her concrete appearances as they come to him. Forms and colors are given him through the eye; sounds as they reach him through the ear; fragrances as wafted to his sense of smell. On this side of analysis there is enough, and more than enough, for him. The outward appearances he feels more intensely, and renders into words more graphically than ordinary men, — no other describes them so to the quick, — yet he does not rest in them, but passes with them inward and brings them into relation with his own being, or rather with the universal heart of man. The ethereal blue of the sky on a fine spring day delights every man, and something of the delight is no doubt due to the mere eye, to the adaptation of the object to the visual organ; but how much more — who shall say? — is due to the endless suggestiveness of the sight, even though of its manifold meaning nothing may shape itself into words. But it is the poet's privilege not only to describe the outward image, but to draw out some of the many meanings that lie hid in it, and so render them as to win response from his fellow-men. It matters not,

therefore, if it be true, that all men can know of Nature is the sensations it produces in himself. Even if this be all, it is enough for the poet. Leaving to others to deal with its physical uses as the feeder and supporter of the body, it is his to note how it exhilarates the animal spirits; how it passes into the imagination and there becomes rich in suggestiveness; how it entwines itself round the affections; how fruitful it is in resemblances and contrasts to human destiny; what large contemplations and high truths it presents to the reason; how even for conscience, though it contains no direct teaching of moral law, it supplies in its order and harmony the best visible images thereof. In fact, quite endless is the wealth of meaning that lies hid in Nature, the interchange of appeal and response that is possible between the world without and the world within. There is in Nature just as much, or as little, as the soul of each can see in her. And in order to see, the soul must have been trained for it both by habitual converse with the outward world, and also by converse with other regions of being, with other teachers. For other teachers are not less necessary than the beauty which lies in the face of Nature.

Poetry, we saw, is the emanation, the golden exhalation, as it were, which arises from the close and vivid meeting of the soul and the outward object. If this be so, the soul must needs contribute to the result not less than the object

which appeals to it. What then must be the power and quality of that soul which is capable of taking in and making full and harmonious response to the whole appeal which Nature is continually making? There must be in the first place an eye to observe accurately what it sees, combined with the power to describe this faithfully in words uncolored and undeflected; in the first instance, by feelings or habits of thought which may be peculiar to the observer. There must be besides a sensibility to all outward appearances, as keenly alive to the vast as to the minute in Nature; to the great movements of the heavens and the breadths of light and shadow which they cast, not more than to the delicate veinings that are in the tiniest leaf, to the sighings that are among the reeds, and to the silent openings of the daisy and the celandine. These two qualities are mostly found among those whose childhood has passed in the country, who have known Nature as a household friend that has entwined itself among their first affections. No doubt there are cases of city-bred poets, such as Keats, who, having been shut out from free access to Nature till they were full-grown men, have then taken to it with an instinctive passion.[1]

[1] Since writing the above passage, I have been pleased to find in Mr. Hamerton's *Sylvan Year*, the following passage, which expresses more fully the same thought. He speaks (page 68) of "the delight of the citizen in green leaves, and the intensity of sensation about Nature which we find in poets who were bred in towns; whilst those who have lived much in the country, though

But even in these rare cases there will generally be felt in their descriptions something exaggerated, that shows the want of habitual familiarity with the ways of Nature, and makes us feel that it has been approached rather on set purpose as an object of artistic study, than known with the easy intimacy of early friendship. If to these two qualities we add imagination, even as penetrative as that of Keats, which went to the core of all it saw, even this outfit of qualities would not be sufficient adequately to render all that Nature contains of high and noble.

Such sensuous enjoyment of Nature, quickened by imagination, but unbalanced by deeper qualities, has led more than one, and especially in our own day, to an attempted revival of vanished Paganism, which, if made the key-note of any Poetry, is destructive of true manliness and of the highest human worth. By such a sensuous temperament, the forms and colors and fragrancies of the outward world may be deliciously enjoyed and vividly rendered. But this is all. The deeper tones that lie in the silences of Nature will be all inaudible, unless the ear be overhearing at the same time the deep music of the heart. For the soul to apprehend all that Nature contains of meaning, there must be present not only the eye keenly observing, and tenderly sensitive to natural beauty; but behind this must be a

they know and observe more, seem to feel more equably, and to go to Nature with less of sensuous thirst and excitement."

heart feelingly alive to all that is most affecting in human life, sentiment, and destiny. And not only this, but in all survey of created things the upward look, unexpressed it may be, yet ever present, toward the Uncreated. It cannot but affect even the poet's feeling about the most common material things, what may be his regards toward that Unseen Presence on which, not Nature only, but the spirit of man reposes. As he looks on the face of earth, sea, and sky, the thought, whence come these things, whither tend they, what is their origin and their end, must habitually enter in and color that which the eye beholds. It can hardly be but that a man's inner thoughts about these things will find their way out and color the observation of his eye. Even the ethereal beauty of Shelley's descriptions — his perception of the motion of clouds and shadows and sunbeams — his delight in all skyey and evanescent things too delicate for grosser eyes, — you cannot read them long without being crossed by some breath blown from his own distempered moral atmosphere. The "sky-cleaving" crags suggest to him heaven-defying minds, and his mountains have a voice "to repeal large codes of fraud and woe." Byron, — though his later poetry contains noble passages on mountain scenery, even the high Alps are hardly strong enough to lure him into temporary forgetfulness of his own unhappy self, and his quarrel with mankind. In fact, so closely and deeply

united are all the parts of the universe, that no one can apprehend the full compass of its manifold harmonies, whose own heart is not filled with that central harmony which sets it right with God and man.

CHAPTER III.

POETIC AND SCIENTIFIC WONDER.

But some one may ask, Is not imagination generally at war with reason and truth? Is not the quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy as old as the days of Plato? Did not he feel this so keenly that he banished poets as false teachers from his well-ordered State?

Luckily we have not to answer this question in all its breadth and complexity; we are not now called to defend the truth of Poetry in its delineations of human character and emotions. Our subject confines us to that simpler aspect of the question which concerns the action of imagination on the external world. When the eye rests on the ranging landscape, and the heart responds to the beauty of it, the emotion which is evoked is as true and as rational as is the action of any law of Nature. This kindling of heart in the presence of Nature may be said to be "another aspect of reason." It is not confined to any one order of men or stage of civilization, but belongs alike to the child, the peasant, and the philosopher, if only the heart be natural and unspoiled. No doubt the imaginative frame

of mind differs in each according to difference of mental habits, but in all alike it is essentially one. It is a spontaneous and unconscious acknowledgment of the beauty of the Universe — a proof to those who think about it that the Universe was made for the soul of man, and the soul for the Universe, that there is between them a wonderful harmony, the one answering to the other as the harp-strings to the hand of the musician.

Take instances of this feeling, not from past times, but as it may exist in our own day. The Yarrow shepherd, as he goes forth at dawn and sees morning spread on the hills of the Forest, feels a momentary elevation of heart for which he has no words, and of which he may be but half-conscious; but in this feeling he has within him the first stirrings of that which, when the poet fashions it into fitting words, becomes an immortal song. His grandfather, a hundred years ago or less, when he saw the first streaks of dawn strike some lonely peak, or the early pencilings of light falling down into some hidden dell, embodied his feelings of that beauty in the imagination of Fairies retiring from their moonlight dances into the green knolls where they made their homes. The Ettrick Shepherd, in his childhood, was perhaps among the last who had a genuine feeling and belief of these symbols. They passed with him, but though the symbols have vanished the same appearances re-

main, and awaken the old feeling, and the feeling still needs a language.

So too was it with that Westmoreland dalesman who, as he walked with the poet Wordsworth by the side of a brook, suddenly said to him, with great spirit and a lively smile, "I like to walk where I can hear the sound of a beck." Beck is the Westmoreland word for what in England is called a brook, in Scotland a burn. "I cannot but think," adds the poet, "that this man, without being conscious of it, has had many devout feelings connected with the appearances which presented themselves to him in his employment as a shepherd, and that the pleasure of his heart was an acceptable offering to the Divine Being." This is Wordsworth's reflection. I shall but add that his liking to hear the sound of a beck was a proof that the outward sound had ceased to be a mere commonplace to him, and passing inward, had awakened an imaginative echo which is the birth of poetry.

Or take another instance — that youth, a shepherd lad, but more poet and philosopher than shepherd, whom Wordsworth describes watching the sunrise on the Highland mountains: —

> "For the growing youth,
> What soul was his, when from the naked top
> Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
> Rise up, and bathe the world in light. He looked —
> Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth,
> And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay
> In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,

And in their silent faces did he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion which transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love."

As we read such a passage, the thought involuntarily arises, What if the said youth, instead of being a nursling of nature among the hills of Atholl, had been college-bred, and crammed with all the '*ologies* which Physical Science now teaches, would he still have had the same elevated joy in presence of that spectacle? It is the old question which Plato asked, and which many since have asked down to our own time. In 1842 Haydon wrote to Wordsworth, recalling a dinner-party which took place many years before at the painter's house: "Don't you remember Keats proposing 'Confusion to the memory of Newton,' and upon your insisting on an explanation before you drank it, his saying, Because he destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism?" Suppose the Atholl shepherd lad had been an optician, and understood all the laws of light by which the effulgent hues of sunrise were

elicited; suppose, further, that he had been an astronomer, and as he saw the sunrise had begun to reflect, It is not the sun that I see rising, but it is the earth that is rotating on her own axis, and now turning her side toward the sun, that causes all that I now see; and that axis is not vertical, but slants obliquely to the plane of its orbit, — supposing these, and a hundred other truths, which Physical Astronomy teaches, had come into his mind, would he still have had that sublime joy?

Or suppose, again, he had been a geologist, and, as he gazed over the mountain ridges, had begun to think of them as a record of commotions that took place in far-back geological eras, and to reflect how the stratified layers of which these mountains are composed had been formed by the slime deposited at the bottom of a long since vanished sea; how they had been upheaved by the action of subterranean forces; how some of the great depressions which we call valleys, or those rents in the mountains, now filled by sea-lochs, had been caused by the cracking of the earth's crust, while it was still a heated mass, glowing from the primeval fires; how other lesser glens and corries had been sculptured out of the solid earth by Nature's graving tools, ice-wedges, glaciers, rain, and rivers, — in the presence of such scientific thoughts as these, what would become of the boy's imaginative and devout ecstasy?

In answer, it may be said that whether the

scientific man shall feel this spontaneous glow in the presence of the great spectacles of Nature or not, depends not on his scientific knowledge, but on his natural temperament, on the amount of soul there is in him, underlying his attainments. If he be so entirely the man of science, if the intellect has so entirely absorbed his being that he never gets beyond analyzing, comparing, and reasoning on the appearances he sees, then he will look without emotion on the grandest ongoings of Nature ; he will see in them only a subject for investigation — nothing more. But if, as has often been the case, the physicist be a man not only of wide and accurate knowledge, but of large soul, — if his knowledge has become a part of him, has melted into his being, then his heart will be free to kindle and rejoice at the great things of Nature which he sees, as genuinely as the unreflecting child, the thoughtful peasant, or the most spontaneous poet.

As genuinely, but with a difference: the eye of the imaginative man of science will take in all that these others do, and more. His admiration will be fuller, larger, more instructed. The knowledge that has been gradually lodged in his mind, and become a part of it, will pass into his eye, and enable him to see, on whatever side of the Universe he looks, more complicated marvels, more wonderful correspondences.

"In Wonder," says Coleridge, "all Philosophy began : in Wonder it ends : and Admiration fills

up the interspace." The last clause I should change thus, — and Investigation fills up the interspace. In the first Wonder and in the last the Philosopher and the Poet are akin to each other. Both wonder, both admire what they see, but this incipient wonder tends to different results. The unscientific poet, just like the child and the thoughtful peasant, wonders at the beauty that is in the face of Nature, and at its mystery, seeks no physical explanations of it, but reads its moral and spiritual meaning, and tries to utter it. The man of science equally begins with wonder at what he sees, but his wonder leads him on to seek for an explanation, to search for the laws which regulate the appearances, if haply he may find them.

Then comes the long interspace of toilsome labor, of painful analysis, of rigorous induction. Experiment, analysis, deductive and inductive reasoning, by which chiefly Science works, are intellectual acts quite distinct from imaginative intuition and emotion, and, in some degree, opposed to them. It cannot be that these distinct processes can be combined in one intellectual act. They can hardly go on in one mind at the same time. While a man is immersed in these scientific processes, they preclude the poetic vision for the time. For many men they scare away poetry from the world forever.

Not so with the largest, most sovereign minds of Science. Lesser men of dry or narrow minds

may be so entangled in the meshes of their own understanding as never to escape from them, or may find more delight in the cleverness of their own explanations than in the wonderful things which they explain. But the larger minds, when they have done their work, emerge in time from the study and the laboratory, and look abroad with expanded vision and profounder reverence on that Universe, some small part only of which it has been given them to understand. Kepler, after he had discovered so far the laws of planetary motion, said that all that he had been able to do was to read a few of the thoughts of God. A short time before his death, Newton is reported to have said, and I give the oft-told story in the authentic words, "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." [1] A lesson surely to all future investigators, and, as his latest biographer has said, "to those especially who have never even found the smoother pebble or the prettier shell." These great men, so feeling, are in the attitude of philosophic wonder — wonder both at part of the ways of God which it has been given them to see, and at that vaster part which they feel to lie be-

[1] *Life of Sir Isaac Newton*, by Sir David Brewster, vol. ii. pp. 407, 408.

yond their vision. These laws which they have discovered, what are they? whence come they? They know that they themselves did not make them, only attained to catch sight of them. They know too that the laws did not make themselves. They are beautiful in themselves and in their benign operation; they are wonderful in their origin and continuance. This is what those great discoverers felt. And when they stood on the utmost verge of their scientific knowledge, and looked from what they had been allowed to see out upon the great beyond, they were rapt into that mood of wonder, akin to awe, which is the very essence of Poetry. Had they, in addition to their great scientific insight, been endowed with the gift of poetic utterance to express the wonder which they felt, they might have left to the world a poem of scientific truth transfigured by the imagination, such as has never yet been uttered.

Thus we see there is a poetic glow of wonder and emotion before Science begins its work; there is a larger, deeper, more instructed wonder when it ends. And either of these may naturally express itself in poetry, though the earlier wonder has done so far more frequently than the later. That the contemplation of the Universe does awaken this wonder in minds of the highest scientific order appears in the instances of Kepler and Newton. It has been shown in the case of an original discover nearer our own day than

either of these — I mean in that of Faraday. The following account of the imaginative delight which he felt in his scientific investigations I venture to quote from a very suggestive lecture of Mr. Stopford Brooke.

"Nature and her contemplation, says Professor Tyndall, produced in him a kind of spiritual exaltation: his delight in a sunset or a thunder-storm amounted to ecstasy. Our subjects are so glorious, he says himself, that to work at them rejoices and encourages the feeblest, delights and contents the strongest. In this delight and enchantment he was always in the temper of the poet, and, like the poet, he continually reached that point of emotion which produces poetic creation. Once, after long brooding on the subject of force and matter, he saw, and I am sure suddenly, as a poet sees a song from end to end before he writes it down, — he saw, as if lit by a stream of sudden light, the whole of the Universe traversed by lines of force, and these lines in their ceaseless tremors producing light and radiant heat; and dashing forward on the trail of his ideas, and thrilled into creation by the emotion which he felt, declared that these lines were the lines of gravitating force, and that the gravitating force itself constituted matter; that is, he made force identical with matter. It was a speculation which abolished at a stroke the atomic theory and the notion of an ether. Of the possibility of the truth of this I am no judge," says Mr. Stopford

Brooke. "Faraday himself calls it the shadow of a speculation. But who does not see that it proceeded after the manner of poetry; that in it poetry and philosophy went hand in hand? It was one of those inspired, sudden guesses which come to the poet who writes of the soul, coming to the philosopher who writes of the universe. In the midst of unremitting work at details suddenly a vision of the glory of the sum of things flashed upon his sight."

CHAPTER IV.

WILL SCIENCE PUT OUT POETRY?

HERE an interesting question suggests itself: What if the discoveries of Newton and Faraday were to become no longer the exclusive possession of the learned, but were to pass into the daily thoughts of the people? Would Poetry then be any longer possible? Were the scientific view of the Universe to become the popular one, were all men to regard the sight of the heavens and the earth, not with natural spontaneous eyes, but as the chemist, the astronomer, and the geologist teach us to regard them, — were scientific truth, in short, to supersede surface appearance, — would it be any longer possible to feel, as we look on the face of things, that free and intuitive delight out of which Poetry has hitherto been born? In a word, to express the fear which many hearts have felt, must not the march of Science trample out Poetry? Is not Poetry destined to disappear in this modern time, like many other things, once beautiful, but now antiquated?

To this the reply is, There is no fear that it will, as long as human nature remains what it is.

If the view already taken of the genesis of Poetry be true, if man is so made that the vivid contact of his soul with reality or existence of any kind must generate that glow of emotion which is poetry, then it cannot be that any enlargement for him of the domain of reality which Science may effect shall be the death of Poetry. For, like Religion, to which it is akin, Poetry is thus seen to be a perennial and necessary growth, having its root, not only in the heart of man, but in the constitution of things, and in the adaptation of these, the one to the other. Science, however, though it can never eradicate the poetic feeling, may modify its nature, or rather may enlarge its range. But let it be clearly understood how it may do this. The processes of Science and of Poetry are radically distinct, and cannot be blended without confusion and injury to both. Experiment, analysis, reasoning inductive and deductive, these are the means by which Science makes its advances, and with these Poetry cannot rightly intermeddle. Imaginatively to contemplate the spectacle of the world is possible before Science has begun, it is possible, also, after it has completed its work. But it is not possible to combine imaginative contemplation and scientific investigation at the same time, and in one mental act. Only after analysis and reasoning have done their work and secured their results is the man of science free to look abroad on Nature with a poetic eye. Analysis and ex-

perimentalizing cannot by any possibility be made poetic, but their results may. Every new province of knowledge which Science conquers, Poetry may in time enter into and possess. But this can only be done gradually. Before imagination can take up and mould the results of Science, these must have ceased to be difficult, laborious, abstruse. The knowledge of them must have become to the poet himself, and in some measure to his audience, familiar, habitual, spontaneous. And here we see how finely Science and Poetry may interact and minister each to the other. If it be the duty of Science beneath seeming confusion to search for order, and its happiness to find it everywhere, — an order more vast, more various, more deeply penetrating, more intimate and minute than uninstructed men ever dreamed of, — wherever it reveals the presence of this, does it not open new fields for the imagination to appropriate? For what is order but the presence of thought, the ground of all beauty, the witness to the actual nearness of an upholding and moving Spirit? This is the vast new domain which Science is unveiling and spreading out before the eye of Poetry. And Poetry, receiving this large benefit, may repay the debt by using her own peculiar powers to familiarize men's thoughts with the new regions which Science has won for them. If there is any office which Imagination can fulfill, it is this. She can help to bring home to the mind things which, though

true, are yet strange, distant, perhaps distasteful. She can mediate between the warm, household feelings and the cold and remote acquisitions of new knowledge, and make the heart feel no longer "bewildered and oppressed" among the vast extent and gigantic movements of the Universe, but at home amongst them, soothed and tranquillized. Not, however, out of her own resources alone can Imagination do this. She must bring from the treasure-house of Religion moral and spiritual lights and impulses, and with these interpenetrate the cold, boundless spaces which the telescope has revealed. Some beginning of such a reconciling process we may see here and there in those poems of "In Memoriam" in which the Poet-Laureate has finely inwrought new truths of Science into the texture of yearning affection and spiritual meditation. Even where the views of Science are not only strange, but even at first crude and repulsive, Imagination can soften their asperity and subdue their harsher features. Just as when a railway has been driven through some beautiful and sequestered scene, outraging its quiet and scarring its loveliness, we see Nature in time return, and "busy with a hand of healing," cover the raw wounds with grass, and strew artificial mounds and cuttings with underwood and flowers. It seems then that while Science gives to Poetry new regions to work upon, Poetry repays the debt by familiarizing and humanizing what Science has discovered. Such is their mutual interaction.

Mr. Stopford Brooke has told us that if on the scientific insight of Faraday could be engrafted the poetic genius of Byron, the result would be a poem of the kind "for which the world waits." For "to write on the universal ideas of Science," he says, "through the emotions which they excite, will be part of the work of future poets of Nature." Likely enough it may be so. For if Poetry were to leave large regions of new thought unappropriated, being thus divorced from the onward march of thought, it would speedily become obsolete and unreal. But let us well understand what are the conditions of such poetry, the conditions on which alone Imagination can wed itself to scientific fact. The poet who shall sing the songs of Science must first be perfectly at home in all the new truths, must move among them with as much ease and freedom as ordinary men now do among the natural appearances of things. And not the poet only, but his audience must move with ease along the pathways which Science has opened. For if the poet has first to instruct his readers in the facts which he wishes imaginatively to render, while he expounds he will become frigid and unpoetic. Just as Lucretius is dull in those parts of his poem in which he has to argue out and to expound the Atomic Theory, and only then soars when, exposition left behind, he can give himself up to contemplate the great elemental movements, the vast life that pervades the sum of

things. For in order that any truth or view of things may become fit material for poetry, it must first cease to live exclusively in the study or the laboratory, and come down and make itself palpable in the market-place. The scientific truths must be no longer strange, remote, or technical. If they have not yet passed into popular thought, they must at least have become the habitual possession of the more educated before the poet can successfully deal with them. This is the necessary condition of their poetic treatment. Wordsworth, in one of his Prefaces, has stated so clearly the truth on this subject that I cannot do better than give his words. "If the time should ever come," he says, "when what is now called Science becomes familiarized to men, then the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, the mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed. He will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of Science itself. The poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man."

Science therefore may in some measure modify Poetry, may enlarge its range, may reveal new phases of it, but can never supersede it. The imaginative view of things which Poetry expresses is not one which can grow obsolete. It

is not the child of any one particular stage of knowledge or civilization, which can be put aside when a higher stage has been reached. Any state of knowledge can give scope to it. Any aspect of the world, that seen by the savage as well as that of the sage, can awaken that imaginative glow of mind, that thrill of emotion, which, expressed in fitting words, is called Poetry. Only, as has been said above, before any aspect of nature, or fact of life, or truth of science, may be capable of poetic treatment, it must have become habitual and easy to the mind of the poet, and in some measure to that of his audience. In the poet's mind, at least, it must have passed out of the region of mere head-notions into the warmer atmosphere of imaginative intuition, and, vitalized there, must have bodied itself into beautiful form and flushed into glowing color. For, to repeat once again what has been said at the outset, Poetry originates in the vivid contact of the soul — not of the understanding merely, but of the whole soul — with reality of any kind; and it is the utterance of the joy that arises, of the glow that is felt, from such soul-contact with the reality of things. When that reality has passed inward, and kindled the soul to "a white heat of emotion," then it is that genuine Poetry is born.

CHAPTER V.

HOW FAR SCIENCE MAY MODIFY POETRY.

It may be worth while to dwell a little longer on the way in which Poetry and Science respectively deal with external Nature, noticing in what respects their methods agree, in what they differ, wherein they seem to modify each other, and how each aims at a separate and distinct end of its own.

The first thing to remark is, that in the presence of Nature the poet and the man of science are alike observers. But in respect of time the poet has the precedence. Long before the botanist had applied his microscope to the flower, or the geologist his hammer to the rock, the poet's eye had rested upon these objects, and noted the beauty of their lineaments. The poets were the first observers, and the earliest and greatest poets were the most exact and faithful in their observations. In the Psalms of Israel and in the Poems of Homer how many of the most beautiful and affecting images of Nature have been seized and embalmed in language which for exactness cannot be surpassed, and for beauty can never grow obsolete! Indeed, fidelity to the truth of Nat-

ure, even in its minutest details, may be almost taken as a special note of the higher order of poets. It is not Homer but Dryden who to express the silence of night makes the drowsy mountains nod. It is a vulgar error which supposes that it is the privilege of imagination to absolve the poet from the duty of exact truth, and to set him free to make of Nature what he pleases. True imagination shows itself by nothing more than by that exquisite sensibility to beauty which makes it love and reverence Nature as it is. It feels instinctively that "He hath made everything beautiful in his time;" therefore it would not displace a blade of grass nor neglect the veining of a single leaf. Of course, from the touch of a great poet, the commonest objects acquire something more than exactness and truth of detail; they become forms of beauty, vehicles of human sentiment and emotion. But before they can be so used, fidelity to fact must first be secured. They cannot be made symbols of higher truth unless justice has first been done to the truth of fact concerning them. Hence it is that the works of the great poets of all ages are very repositories in which the features and ever-changing aspects of the outward world are rendered with the most loving fidelity and "vivid exactness." This is one very delicate service which genuine poets have done to their fellowmen. They have by an instinct of their own noted the appearance of earth and sky, and kept

alive the sense of their beauty during long ages when the world was little heedful of these things. How many are there who would own that there are features in the landscape, wild-flowers by the way-side, tender lights in the sky, which they would have passed forever unheeded, had not the remembered words of some poet awakened their eye to look on these things and to discern their beauty! Who ever now sees the "wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower," and notes the peculiar coloring of the petals, without a new feeling of beauty in the flower itself, and of the added beauty it has received since the eye of Burns dwelt so lovingly upon it!

The observation of the world around them in those early poets, clear and transparent, was instinctive, almost unconscious. It proceeded not by rules or method, but was spontaneous, prompted by love. What Mrs. Hemans finely says of Walter Scott among his own woods at Abbotsford, may be said of all the great poets in their converse with Nature —

> "Where every tree had music of its own,
> To his quick ear of knowledge taught by love."

Likely enough it will be said, that spontaneous, childlike kind of observation was all well enough in the pre-scientific era. But now, in this day of trained observation and experiment, have not the magnifying-glass of the botanist and the crucible of the chemist quite put out the poet's vocation as an observer of natural things? Have not

these taught us truth about Nature, so much more close, exact, and penetrating, as to have discredited altogether that mere surface observation which is all that is possible to the poet? In the presence of this newer, more sifting investigation, can the imagery of the poets any longer live? Has not the rigorous analysis of modern times, and the knowledge thence accruing, abolished the worth and meaning of that first random information gathered by the eye?

In reply, may it not be said the observations of the poet have real meaning and truth, but it is a different kind of truth which the poet and the man of science extract from the same object? The poet, in as far as he is an observer at all, must be as true and as accurate in the details he gives as the man of science is, but the end which each seeks in his observation is different. In examining a flower, the botanist, when he has noted the number of stamens and petals, the form of the pistil, the corolla, the calyx, and other floral organs, — when he has registered these, and so given the flower its place in his system, his work is done. These things, too, the poet observes, and in his descriptions, if he does not give them a place, he must at least not contravene them; but he observes them as means to a further end. That end is to see and express the loveliness that is in the flower, not only the beauty of color and of form, but the sentiment which, so to speak, looks out from it, and which

is meant to awaken in us an answering emotion. For this end he must observe accurately, since the form and hues of the flower discerned by the eye are a large part of what gives it relation and meaning to the soul. The outward facts of the wild-flowers he must not distort, but reverently observe them; but, when observed, he must not rest in them, but see them as they stand related to the earth out of which they grow, to the wood which surrounds them, to the sky above them, which waits on them with its ministries of dew, rain, and sunshine, — indeed, to the whole world, of which they are a part, and to the human heart, to which they tenderly appeal.

On this wide subject, the bearing of scientific on poetic truth, I know not where can be found truer and more suggestive teaching than that contained in Mr. Ruskin's great work on Modern Painters. Each volume of that work, which has influenced so powerfully the painting of our time, has much to teach to the poet and to the student of Poetry. In the Preface to the Second Edition many of the principles expanded throughout the work are condensed. From that Preface I venture to quote one or two passages which throw much light on the subject of our discussion: —

"The sculptor is not permitted to be wanting either in knowledge or expression of anatomical detail. . . . . That which to the anatomist is the end is to the sculptor the means. The former desires details for their own sake; the latter,

that by means of them he may kindle his work with life, and stamp it with beauty. And so in landscape: botanical or geological details are not to be given as a matter of curiosity or subject of search, but as the ultimate elements of every species of expression and order of loveliness."

Again: "Details alone, and unreferred to a final purpose, are the sign of a tyro's work. . . . . Details perfect in unity and contributing to a final purpose are the sign of the production of a consummate master. It is not details sought for their own sake . . . . which constitute great art, — they are the lowest, most contemptible art; but it is detail referred to a great end, sought for the sake of the inestimable beauty which exists in the slightest and least of God's works, and treated in a manly, broad, and impressive manner. There may be as much greatness of mind, as much nobility of manner, in a master's treatment of the smallest features, as in his management of the more vast; and this greatness of manner chiefly consists in seizing the specific character of the object, together with all the great qualities of beauty which it has in common with the higher orders of existence."

Once more: "This is the difference between the mere botanist's knowledge of plants and the great poet's or painter's knowledge of them. The one notes their distinctions for the sake of swelling his herbarium, the other that he may render them vehicles of expression and emotion. The

one counts the stamens, affixes a name, and is content; the other observes every character of the plant's color and form; considering each of its attributes as an element of expression, he seizes on its lines of grace or energy, rigidity or repose, notes the feebleness or the vigor, the serenity or tremulousness of its hues; observes its local habits, its love or fear of peculiar places, its nourishment or destruction by particular influences; he associates it in his mind with all the features of the situations it inhabits and the ministering agencies necessary to its support. Thenceforward the flower is to him a living creature, with histories written on its leaves and passions breathing in its motion. Its occurrence in his picture is no mere point of color, no meaningless spark of light. It is a voice rising from the earth, a new chord of the mind's music, a necessary note in the harmony of his picture, contributing alike to its tenderness and its dignity, nor less to its loveliness and its truth."

If in the observation of Nature the ends which the poet has in view and the effects which he brings out are different from those aimed at by the man of science, not less distinct are the mental powers which each brings into play. The man of science investigates that he may reach rigid accuracy of fact, and this he does by the exercise of the dry understanding, and by the use of the analytic method. The poet contemplates the single objects or the vast spectacle of Nature,

in order that he may discern the beauty that pervades both the parts and the whole, and that he may apprehend the intimations — the great thoughts, I might call them — which come to him through that beauty, and which make their appeal to the power of imaginative sympathy within him. Nature, whether in detail or as a whole, he regards in the relation it bears, whether of likeness or of contrast, to the soul, the emotions, and the destiny of man. But this relation he must seize, not by neglecting or setting aside facts, but by noting them with all the fidelity consistent with his main purpose.

But it may be well to mark more definitely some of the ways in which the extension of natural science in modern times has reacted on the work of the poet.

1*st.* It has fallen in with, though it has not originated, that remarkable change in the mental attitude in which modern times stand toward Nature, a change of which more will have to be said presently, but which it is enough here to allude to. For that ardent, sensitive, reverent regard which the modern time turns on Nature, recent research may be said to have furnished a rational basis, a sufficient justification. Not that Science created this mental attitude, this newborn sentiment; it is due to other, more subtle and hidden causes. Indeed, it may be that the two great contemporaneous influences, the increased activity of physical discovery working by

scientific analysis, and the enlarged and heightened admiration of Nature as seen through the imagination, are but opposite sides of the one great current of modern thought. Shelley speaks of the "intense and comprehensive imagery which distinguishes the modern literature of England," and this, though by no means a product of physical science, is in keeping with its revelations, though it goes beyond and supplements them.

2*d*. Again: the greatest of the early poets, as we have seen, were instinctive lovers of Nature, and faithful delineators of its forms. But in presence of the unresting scrutiny and careful exactness of Science, modern poets are stimulated to still closer, more minute observation. Indeed, there may be danger lest this tendency in Poetry go too far, and make it too microscopic and forgetful of that higher function which, while seeing truly, ever spiritualizes what it sees. However this may be, it is clear that Science by its contagion has stimulated the observing powers of the modern poet, and made him more than ever a heedful

> "Watcher of those still reports
> Which Nature utters from her rural shrine."

3*d*. Again: since the progress of modern Science has let in on the mental vision whole worlds of new facts and new forces, — a height and a depth, a vastness and minuteness in Nature, as she works all around us, alike in the smallest pebble on the shore, and "in the loftiest star of

unascended heaven," — it cannot be but that all this now familiar knowledge should enter into the sympathetic soul of the poet, and color his eye as he looks abroad on Nature. When the eye, for instance, from the southern beach of the Moray Firth passes over to its northern shore, and rests on the succession of high plateaux and precipiced promontories which form the opposite coast, and observes how the whole landscape has been shaped, moulded, and rounded into its present uniformity of feature by the glaciers that untold ages since descended from Ben Wyvis and his neighboring altitudes, and wore and ground the masses of old red sandstone into the outlines of the bluffs he now sees, — who can look on such a spectacle without having new thoughts awakened within him, of Nature working with her primeval wedges of frost, ice, and flood, to carve the solid rock into the lineaments before him, and of the still higher power behind Nature that directs and controls all these her movements to ulterior and sublimer ends! When, in addition to these thoughts, the gazer calls to mind that these are the native headlands which first arrested the meditative eye of the great northern mason, more than any other, geologist and poet in one, and fed the fire of his young enthusiasm, does not the geologic charactery that is scrawled upon these rocks receive a strange enhancement of human interest?

Again: the huge gray bowlders, strewn here

and there on the top of those promontories, and all about the dusky moors, when we learn that they have been floated to their present stations from leagues away by long vanished glaciers, no doubt their gaunt shapes become wonderfully suggestive. And yet, perhaps, nothing that geology can teach regarding them will ever invest them with a more imaginative aspect than that which they wore to the poet's eye, when, caring little enough for scientific theories, it shaped them into this human phantasy —

> "As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all who do the same espy
> By what means it hath hither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense;
> Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself."

But no doubt the truths of geology, if known to a poet, will in some measure enter into his description of scenery. For as the geological structure of a country powerfully moulds and determines its features, the knowledge of this, if possessed, must enter into the poet's eye as it ranges over the landscape. How powerfully geological causes are to modify scenery is well set forth in a passage of the same Preface of Mr. Ruskin's from which I have already quoted.

The new light which the discovery of these facts throws upon scenery cannot now well be neglected by the poet. And it is impossible to divine how many new facts and farther vistas

into the recesses of Nature future discovery may open up, which, when they have passed into the educated mind, poets must in their own way find expression for. But one thing is clear, the poet, however he may avail himself of scientific truth, must not himself merge the Poet in the investigator or analyst. That function he must leave to the physicist, and be content to employ the material with which the physicist furnishes him to enrich and enlarge his vision of beauty. Moreover, the scientific facts he uses must not be those which are still abstruse and difficult, but those with which educated men at least have already become familiar. But, above all, the poet, if he is not to abdicate his function, must retain that freshness of eye, that childlikeness of heart, which looks forth with ever-young delight and wonder and awe on the great spectacle which Nature spreads before him. Most men have lost this gift, their spirits being crushed beneath the dead weight of custom. Our boasted civilization and education have done their best to destroy it; so that now it has come about that to the dull mechanic mind this marvelous earth is but a black ball of mud, painted here and there with some streaks of green and gold. To the drily scientific mind, which fancies itself educated, it is merely a huge piece of mechanism, like some great mill or factory, worked by forces which he proudly tabulates and calls Laws of Nature. But to the true poet the earth and sky have not yet

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lost all their original brightness. His eye still sees them with the dew upon them, in inspired moments still catches sight of the visionary gleam. His gift it is, his peculiar function, seeing this himself, to make others see and feel it, to make his fellow-men sharers in his perceptions and in the joy they bring. He purges our dulled eyes as with euphrasy and rue, and opens them to partake of the vision which he himself beholds. For after all the sciences have said their say, and propounded their explanations of things, as far as they go, the poet feels that there is in this visible Universe, and the spectacle it presents, something more than all the sciences have as yet grasped or ever will grasp — feels that there is in and through and behind all Nature a mysterious life, which he "cannot compass, cannot utter," but which he must still bear witness to. This great truth which lay at the bottom of the old mythologies, which gives meaning to many forms of mysticism, but which our dull mechanic philosophies have long discredited, still haunts the soul of the poet, and, feeling it profoundly himself, he longs to express and make others feel it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTICAL SIDE OF NATURE.

4*th*. The mystical feeling which the contemplation of Nature has awakened in poets of every age, but which our own day has so greatly expanded, while it is not directly suggested by Science, yet finds support from its disclosures. That great spectacle which from earliest ages has thrilled the poet's soul with rapture and awe we know now to be produced by recognized laws, to be interpenetrated by numberless well-ordered forces, which are indeed but thought localized, reason made visible. The intuitive wonder which the earliest poet felt is more than justified by the latest discoveries of Science.

And yet, be it observed, whatever support the truths of Science may give to the poet's instinctive perceptions, it is not on the physical causes and operations revealed by Science that his eye chiefly dwells. He has an object of contemplation which is distinct from these and peculiar to himself, and that is the Beauty which he sees in the face of the Universe. Over and above the physical laws which uphold and carry on this framework of things, beyond all the uses which

this mechanism subserves, there is this further fact, this additional result, that all these laws and forces in their combination issue in Beauty. This Beauty, while it is created by the collocation and harmonious working of the physical laws, is a thing distinct from them and their operation. It is an aspect of things with which the physicist as such does not intermeddle, but it is as real and as powerful over the minds of men as any force which Science has disclosed. Modern discovery may have enlarged and intensified it, but has in no way originated it. In this Beauty the poet from the first has found his favorite field, the main region of his energy. For ages the vision of this beauty has haunted, riveted, fascinated him. And if he is no longer as of old its sole guardian, he is still, whether speaking through verse or prose, its best and truest interpreter. This truth, that the Beauty of Nature is something in thought distinct, though in fact inseparable from the machinery of Nature, has been brought out and dwelt on with remarkable power by Canon Mozley in his most suggestive sermon on "Nature." And he further insists with great force on the truth that it is this spectacle of beauty produced by the useful laws which is the special province of the poet: —

"He fixes his eye upon the passive spectacle, upon Nature as an appearance, a sight, a picture. To another he leaves the search and analysis; he is content to look, and to look only; this, and

this alone, satisfies him; he stands like a watcher or sentinel, gazing on earth, sea, and sky, upon the vast assembled imagery, upon the rich majestic representation on the canvas." [1]

It is then the spectacle of beauty produced by the combination of physical laws, this beauty, and not the physical laws which produce it, on which the poet fixes his gaze. In the presence of it the poet's first mental attitude is one of pure receptivity. As the clear windless lake, spread out on a still autumn day, takes into its steady bosom every feature of the surrounding mountains, every hue of the overhanging sky, so is his soul spread out to receive into itself the whole imagery of Nature. When this wise passiveness has been undergone, what images, sentiments, thoughts the poet will give back depends on the capaciousness, the depth, the clearness of soul within him. The highest poetry of Nature is that which receives most inspiration from the spectacle, which extracts out of it the largest number of great and true thoughts. And a thought or idea, as Mr. Ruskin has taught us, "is great in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies and, in occupying, exercises and exalts the faculty by which it is received."

There are no doubt poets who are mainly taken up with the forms and colors of things, and yet no poet can rest wholly in them, for this, if for

[1] Mozley's *University Sermons*, p. 141.

no other reason, that in the power of rendering them his art necessarily falls so far below that of the painter. Even those poets who deal most humbly with Nature must, when they endeavor to make us feel its visible beauty, link the outward forms and colors to some simple thoughts of animal delight, or of comfort, or of childhood, or of home affection. This much he must do, if only to make them vivid, to bring them home to us. But he who does not go beyond this has not attained to those higher secrets of Nature, which are open to the meditative imagination. When a reflective man comes on some sudden beauty of scenery in the wilderness where no man is, how often has the thought arisen that all this beauty cannot be wasted on vacancy, that though man comes not that way to see it, there must be other eyes that behold the spectacle, — one Eye at least by which it is not unseen.

Whether we regard the beauty as something wholly external to us, as lying outside of us on the face of Nature, or as a creation resulting from the combination of certain external qualities, and of an intelligent mind which perceives them, whichever of these views we take, the beauty is there, no mere dream or phantasy, but something to whose existence the soul witnesses, as truly as the eye does to the existence of light or of those motions which perceived are light. What is it, whence comes it, what means it? It is not something we can reason from as we can from marks

of contrivance and design. It will not lend itself to any syllogism. But notwithstanding this, or perhaps owing to this, it awakens deeper thoughts, it carries the mind farther than any mere proofs of design can do. The beautiful aspect of the outward world, and the delight which it inspires, are no doubt proofs of a goodness somewhere which supports these, just as food and air are proofs of it. But they are more: they have a mystic meaning, they are hints and intimations of something more than eye, or ear, or mere intellect discover. If the outward world and the mind of man are so constructed that they fall in with, and answer to, each other, — if mere physical qualities, such as height, depth, expansion, silence, solitude, sunshine, shadow, gloom, affect the soul in certain well-known ways, awakening in us emotions of awe and wonder, of peace, gladness, sadness, and solemnity, — we naturally ask ourselves, after being thus moved, why is it we were so affected, what is it in the outward world which awakens these emotions? It is a natural question for those who have felt the strange impulses from the changeful countenance of the world. It was not mere shape or color that so affected them: these feelings did not come by chance, they were not without meaning; they point to something outside of themselves, something inherent in the truth of things. When the spirit within them was so stirred, they felt that that which so addressed

them, though it came through physical things, was more than physical, was spiritual. For it carried their thoughts and feelings quite out of the natural and physical appearances, till they found themselves in commune with something akin to their own spirits, though higher and vaster. The beauty which came to them through eye, ear, and imagination, they felt to belong to the same order as that which more directly addresses their moral heart and conscience. It was the Great Being behind the veil who comes to us directly through the conscience, coming more indirectly, but not less really, through the eye and ear. Not otherwise can we account for the intense love which the sights and sounds of Nature have awakened in the best and purest of men, and the more so as they grew in maturity and serenity of soul.

It is a true instinct when men are led to regard the beauty of the world that comes to them through the eye, and the moral light which shines from behind upon the soul, as coming from one centre, and leading upward to the thought of one Being who is above both. In this way all visible beauty becomes a hint and a foreshadowing of something more than itself. But if Nature is to be the symbol of something higher than itself, to convey intimations of Him from whom both Nature and the soul proceed, man must come to the spectacle with the thought of God already in his heart. He will not get a religion out of the mere sight of Nature, neither

from the uses it subserves as indicating design, nor from the beauty it manifests as hinting at character. No doubt beauty is a half-way element, mediating between the physical laws and the moral sentiments, partaking more of the latter than of the former, as being itself a spiritual perception. No doubt it does in some measure act as a reconciler between those two elements which so often seem to stand out in contrast irreconcilable. But if it is to do this, if it is really to lead the soul upward, man must come to the contemplation of it with his moral convictions clear and firm, and with faith in these as connecting him directly with God. Neither morality nor religion will he get out of beauty taken by itself. If out of the splendid vision spread before him — the sight of earth, sea, and sky, of the clouds, the gleams, the shadows — man could arrive directly at the knowledge of Him who is behind them, how is it that in early ages whole nations, with these sights continually before them, never reached any moral conception of God? how is it that even in recent times many of the most gifted spirits, who have been most penetrated by that vision, and have given it most magnificent expression, have been in revolt against religious faith? It is because they sought in Nature alone, that which alone she was never intended to give. It is because the spectacle of the outward world, however splendid, if we begin with it, and insist on extracting our main

light from it, is powerless to satisfy our human need, to speak any word which fits in to man's moral yearning. Nay, Nature taken alone will often appear no benign mother at all, no dwelling-place of a kindly spirit, but an inexorable and cruel Sphinx, who rears children and makes them glad a little while, only that she may the more relentlessly destroy them.

But he who takes the opposite road, who, instead of looking to visible Nature for his first teaching, begins with the knowledge of himself, of his need, his guilt, his helplessness, and listens to the voice that tells of a strength not his own, and a redemption not in him but for him, he will learn to look on Nature with other and calmer eyes, and to discern a meaning in it which taken by itself it cannot give. Man may then find in the beauty which he sees a hint and intimation of a higher beauty which he does not see — a something revealed to the eye which corresponds to the religious truth revealed to the heart, harmonizing with it and confirming it. He can regard the glory of Nature, not only in itself and for its own sake, but as the foreshadow and prophecy of a higher glory yet to be. And so the sight of Nature, instead of intoxicating, maddening, and rousing to rebellion, soothes, elevates, spiritualizes, chiming in unison with our best thoughts, our purest aspirations.

Canon Mozley, in his sermon on "Nature" already alluded to, has dwelt very powerfully on

this, as the use which the highest Poetry makes of Nature, and has shown that it is at once in accordance with the teaching and practice of Scripture, and true to our human instincts. He shows how sight, the noblest of our senses here, is made the pattern and type of the highest attitude of the soul hereafter. For heaven is represented as "a perfected sight," and he who attains to it is to be a beholder. It is not mere self-rapt thought or inward contemplation, but a future vision of God which is promised. Meanwhile Nature and her works are employed in Scripture, not only as proofs of goodness in God, but also as symbols representative of what He has in keeping for them who shall attain. Out of the storehouse of Nature are taken the materials — the light the rainbow, the sapphire, and the sea of glass — to set forth, as far as can be set forth, the things that shall be, — sight, the noblest sense here, made the type of the highest mental act hereafter; and Nature the spectacle given to employ sight now, and to adumbrate the things that shall be in heaven: — this is the high function assigned by Scripture to sight and to Nature.

When, therefore, in the light of these thoughts we study Nature in this, her highest poetic aspect, we may well feel that we are engaged in no trivial employment, but in one befitting an immortal being. Even the most common acts of minutely observing Nature's handiwork may in this way

partake of a religious character. How much more when the great spectacle of Nature lends itself to devout imagination, and becomes as it were the steps of a stair ascending toward the Eternal!

CHAPTER VII.

PRIMEVAL IMAGINATION WORKING ON NATURE — LANGUAGE AND MYTHOLOGY.

THE thought with which the last chapter closed opens up views which are boundless. Through the imaginative apprehension of outward Nature, and through the beauty inherent in it, we get a glimpse into the connection of the visible world with the realities of morality and of religion. The vivid feeling of Beauty suggests, what other avenues of thought more fully disclose, that the complicated mechanism of Nature which Science investigates and formulates into physical law is not the whole, that it is but the case or outer shell of something greater and better than itself, that through this mechanism and above it, within it, and beyond it, there lie existences which Science has not yet formulated — probably never can formulate — a supersensible world, which, to the soul, is more real and of higher import than any which the senses reveal. It is apprehended by other faculties than those through which Science works, yet it is in no way opposed to Science, but in perfect harmony with it, while transcending it. The mechanical explanation of

things — of the Universe — we accept as far as it goes, but we refuse to take it as the whole account of the matter, for we know, on the testimony of moral and spiritual powers, that there is more beyond, and that that which is behind and beyond the mechanism is higher and nobler than the mechanism. We refuse to regard the Universe as only a machine, and hold by the intuitions of faith and of Poetry, though the objects which these let in on us cannot be counted, measured, or weighed, or verified by any of the tests which some physicists demand as the only gauges of reality. This ideal but most real region, which the visible world in part hides from us, in part reveals, is the abode of that supersensible truth to which conscience witnesses, — the special dwelling-place of the One Supreme Mind. The mechanical world and the ideal or spiritual are both actual. Neither is to be denied, and Imagination and Poetry do their best work when they body forth those glimpses of beauty and goodness which flash upon us through the outer shell of Nature's mechanism.

But

> "Descending
> From these imaginative heights,"

we must turn to the humbler task of showing by a few concrete examples how Imagination has actually worked on the plastic stuff supplied by Nature. To this the readiest way would be to turn to the works of the great poets, and see how

they, as a matter of fact, have dealt with the outward world. Before doing so, however, a few words may be given to the marks which Imagination has impressed on Nature in the prehistoric and preliterary ages. The record of this process lies imbedded in two fossil creations, Language and Mythology.

Language. — In the very childhood of the race, long before regular poetry or literature were thought of, there was a time when Imagination, working on the appearances of the visible world, was the great weaver of human speech, the most powerful agent in forming the marvelous fabric of language. It has long been well known to all who have given attention to the subject, that Metaphor has played a large part in the original formation of language. But how large that part is has only been recently made evident by the researches of Comparative Philology. Metaphor, as all know, means "the transferring of a name from the object to which it properly belongs to other objects which strike the mind as in some way resembling the first object." Now this is the great instrument which works at the production of a large portion of language. And Imagination is the power which creates metaphor, which sees resemblances between things, seizes on them, and makes them the occasion of transferring the name from the well known original object to some other object resembling it, which still waits for a name. Even in our own day newly-invented ob-

jects are often named by metaphor, but metaphors thus consciously formed belong to a later age. Long before such metaphors were formed, Imagination had been silently and unconsciously at work, naming the whole world of mental and spiritual existences by metaphors taken from visible and tangible things. It is quite a commonplace that the whole vocabulary by which we name our souls, our mental states, our emotions, abstract conceptions, invisible and spiritual realities, is woven in the earliest ages by the Imagination from the resemblances which it seemed to perceive between the subtle and still unnamed things of mind, and objects or aspects of the external world. This is not so easily seen in the English language, because owing to our having borrowed almost all our words expressive of mental things from other languages, the marks of metaphor are to our eyes obliterated. In fact all our words for mental and spiritual things are like coins which, having passed through many hands, have had the original image and superscription nearly quite worn out. None the less these are still to be traced by those who have their eyes exercised to it by reason of use. But it is manifest in German, which has spun a large part of its philosophical vocabulary out of native roots. It may be seen, in some measure, in Latin, but much more in Greek philosophical language.

This whole subject has been so well handled and so amply illustrated by Professor Max

Müller in the Second Series of his Lectures on "the Science of Language," and in Archbishop Trench's instructive and delightful volumes on "Words," that I can but refer to these works and make here a few excerpts from them as examples of the general principle of thought to which I have adverted. Locke, as Professor Müller shows, long ago asserted that in all languages "names which stand for things which fall not under our senses have had their first rise from sensible ideas."

Our word "spirit" comes from the Latin *spiritus*, the breath, and *spiro*, to breathe; so *animus*, the soul, a seat of the affections, and *anima*, the living principle, are connected with the Greek ἄνεμος, wind. Indeed, *anima* is sometimes used in Latin for a breeze, as readers of Horace will remember, and all are connected with the Greek verb ἄω, to blow. πνεῦμα, the Greek word used in Scripture to express spirit and a spiritual being, originally means wind and breath, from the verb πνέω, to blow and to breathe. Again, ψυχή, life and soul, is connected with ψύχω, which in Homer means to breathe, to blow. So that in all these cases we see that men, when they first became aware of an invisible and spiritual principle within themselves, named it by an act of imagination from the most impalpable entity their senses perceived, — the wind, or the breath. Again, take our word "ideal." It comes from the Greek ἰδέα, from ἰδεῖν, to see, originally a word

of sight, expressing the look or appearance of a thing, which Plato in time employed to express the most spiritual entities, the supersensible pattern of all created things. Again, our words "imagination" and "imaginative," how have they been formed? The Latin word *imaginatio* occurs but rarely; more frequently the verb *imaginor*, to picture to one's self; more frequent still is *imago*, as if *imitago*, from *imitor*, to imitate. This last is connected with the Greek verb μιμέομαι, meaning also to imitate; and the original of these, and all the cognate words, both Latin and Greek, is the Sanscrit root *mâ*, to measure. So from this very palpable process of measuring the land, there have been spun all the subtle and delicate words that express the working of imagination. So the mental processes expressed by "apprehend," "comprehend," and "conceive," are all derived from bodily processes, and mean respectively to grasp at a thing with the hand, to grasp a thing together, to take and hold together. Again, the word "perceive," from the Latin *percipere*, was in the language of husbandry used for the farmer gathering in the fruits of his fields and storing them in his garner. Was then the mind conceived of as a husbandman who gathers in the notices of sense from the outer world, and stores them in an invisible garner? To "inculcate:" here is another mental word borrowed from husbandry. It means to tread or stamp firmly in with the heel, and was used of the

farmer, who, with his foot or some instrument, carefully pressed home into the earth the seed which he had sown. We see how well the metaphor can be transferred to the process of careful teaching — to the clergyman, for instance, who inculcates religious truth. These are but a few obvious and well-known samples of a process which has gone on in all languages, and has furnished forth our whole stock of names for mental operations and spiritual truths. And Imagination has been the power which has presided over the process, the interpreter mediating between two worlds, and naming the unseen realities of the inner world by analogies which she perceives in them to the sensible objects of the outer. Disciples of the Hume philosophy will see in these facts of language a confirmation of their master's dictum that all ideas and thoughts are but weak and faded copies of the more vivid impressions first stamped on the senses. But those who have been learners in another school, to whom the world of thought has more power and reality than the world of sense, they will read in these facts a different lesson, that He has made all things double, the one over against the other, and that the thought by which both are pervaded is one.

Truly then has it been said, "Language is fossil poetry." And any one who will set himself to spell out those fossils, and the meanings they contain, will find a wonderful record of the way

in which the mind of man has wrought in their formation. This record will lead him down into layers of thought as varied as any which the geologist deciphers, filled with more subtle and marvelous formations than any animal or vegetable fossils. For full exposition and illustration of the mental processes by which so large a portion of language has been created, the reader should turn to Professor Müller's volume, to which I have already referred.

Wholly different from this primeval process of naming things by unconscious metaphors is the modern metaphor, as we find it in the poets. When Shelley speaks of the moon as

> "That orbèd maiden with white fire laden,
> Whom mortals call the Moon,"

he is using a metaphor, and a very fine one, but he does so with perfect consciousness that it is a metaphor, and there is not the least danger of the poet, or any one else, confounding the moon with any maiden, earthly or heavenly.

Again, when Mrs. Hemans addresses the moaning night-winds as

> "Wild, and mighty, and mysterious singers!
> At whose tones my heart within me burns,"

there is no likelihood of any confusion between the winds and mortal singers, no chance of the metaphor ever growing into mythology.

Once more: to return to Shelley —

> "Winter came; the wind was his whip;
> One choppy finger was on his lip:

He had torn the cataracts from the hills,
And they clanked at his girdle like manacles;
His breath was a chain that without a sound
The earth, and the air, and the water bound;
He came, fiercely driven in his chariot-throne
By the ten-fold blasts of the arctic zone."

Here is not only metaphor, but personification so strong and vivid that it is only kept from passing into mythology by the conscious and reflective character of the age in which it was created.

Mythology. — The other great primitive creation wrought by the action of the human imagination, in its attempts to name and explain the appearances of visible Nature, was ancient mythology. That huge unintelligible mass of fable which we find imbedded in the poets of Greece and Rome has long been a riddle which no learning could read. But just as modern telescopes have resolved the dim masses of nebulæ into distinct stars, so the resources of that modern scholarship called Comparative Philology seems at last on the way to let in light on the hitherto impenetrable secret of the origin of religious myths. It has gradually been made probable that the Olympian gods, whatever capricious shapes they afterward assumed, were in their origin but the first feeble efforts of the human mind to name the unnamable, to give local habitation and expression to the incomprehensible Being who haunted men's inmost thoughts, but was above their highest powers of conception. In making this attempt, the religious instinct of our Aryan

forefathers wrought, not through the abstracting or philosophical faculty, but through the thought-embodying, shaping power of imagination, by which in later ages all true poets have worked, that in the dim foretime fashioned the whole fabric of mythology. It was the same faculty of giving a visible shape to thought.

As soon as man wakes up to think of himself, what he is, how he is here, he feels that he depends not on himself, but on something other than and independent of himself; that there is One on whom "our dark foundations rest." "It is He that made us, and not we ourselves;" this is the instinctive cry of the human heart when it begins to reflect that it is here, and to ask how it came here. This consciousness of God, which is the dawn of all religion, is reached not as a conclusion reasoned out from premises, not as a law generalized from a multitude of facts, but as a first instinct of intelligence, a perception flashed on the soul as directly as impressions are borne in upon the sense, a faith which may be afterward fortified by arguments, but is itself anterior to all argument.[1] When this thought awoke, when men felt the reality of "that secret thing which they see by reverence alone," how were they to conceive of it, how name it? for a name was necessary to retain any thought as a permanent possession, much more this thought, the highest of all thoughts. The story of the well-

[1] See Müller's *Lectures on Language*, 2d series, pp. 435, 436.

known Dyaus, or the formation of this name for the Supreme God, has been told so often of late by Professor M. Müller, in his various works, that I should not have ventured to repeat it after him once again, had it not been necessary for the illustration of my present subject. It has been proved that in almost all the Aryan languages — Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, Teutonic, Celtic — the name for the Highest, the Supreme Being, has sprung from one root. "The Highest God received the same name in the ancient mythology of India, Greece, Italy, Germany, and retained the name whether worshiped on the Himalayan mountains or among the oaks of Dodona, or in the Capitol of Rome, or in the forests of Germany." The Sanscrit Dyaus, the Greek Zeus, the Latin Jupiter (Jovis), the Teutonic Tiu (whence our Tuesday), are originally one word, and spring from one root. That root is found in Sanscrit, in the old word *dyu*, which originally meant sky and day. Dyaus therefore meant the bright heavenly Deity. When men began to think of the incomprehensible Being who is above all things, and comprehends all things, and when they sought to name Him, the name must be taken from some known visible thing, and what so natural as that the bright, blue, boundless, all-embracing, sublime, and infinite vault, which contains man and all that man knows, should be made the type and symbol to furnish that name?

When the old Aryan people, before their dis-

persion, thus named their thought about the Supreme as the Shining One, Professor Müller does not think that it was any mere personification of the sky, or Nature-worship, or idolatry that led to their so naming Him. Rather he thinks that that old race were still believers in one God, whom they worshiped under the name Heaven-Father. This inquiry, however, lies beyond our present purpose. What it more concerns us now to note is that it was a high effort of thought to make the blue, calm, all-embracing sky the type and symbol of the Invisible One, and that the power which wrought out that first name for the Supreme was Imagination working unconsciously, we might almost say involuntarily — the same power which in its later conscious action, under control of the poet's will, has found a vent for itself in Poetry.

In the same way Comparative Philology accounts for all the stories about the beautiful youth Phœbus Apollo, Athene, and Aphrodite.

"I look," Professor Müller says, "on the sunrise and sunset, on the daily return of night and day, on the battle between light and darkness, on the whole solar drama in all its details that is acted every day, every month, every year, in heaven and in earth, as the principal subject of early mythology. I consider that the very idea of Divine powers sprang from the wonderment with which the forefathers of the Aryan family stared at the bright (*deva*) powers that came and

went no one knew whence or whither, that never failed, never faded, never died, and were called immortal, *i. e.*, unfading, as compared with the feeble and decaying race of man. I consider the regular recurrence of phenomena an almost indispensable condition of their being raised, through the charms of mythological phraseology, to the rank of immortals: and I give a proportionably small place to the meteorological phenomena, such as clouds, thunder, and lightning, which, although causing for a time a violent commotion in nature and in the heart of man, would not be ranked together with the immortal bright beings, but would rather be classed together as their subjects or as their enemies."

In this eloquent passage Professor Müller expresses his well-known "Solar Theory" of mythology. At the close of the passage he alludes to a counter theory which has been called the Meteoric, which makes mythology find its chief field, not in the calm and uniform phenomena of the sun's coming and going, and of day and night, but in the occasional and violent convulsions of storm, thunder, and earthquake. Not what is fixed and uniform, but what is sudden and startling, most arrests the imagination, according to this latter theory. But it does not concern us here to discuss the claims of these rival views, but rather to remark that in both alike it is the imagination in man to which the aspects of heaven, whether uniform or occasional, calm or turbulent,

make their appeal, and that when, according to that tendency of language noted by Professor Müller, words assume an independent power and dominate over the mind instead of being dominated by it, it is Imagination which throws itself into the tendency, and takes occasion from it to weave its many-tissued, many-colored web of mythologic fable.

But however adequate such theories may be to people the whole Pantheon of Olympus, they seem quite out of place when brought to account for the inhabitants of this lower world. Nothing can seem less likely than that the conceptions of Achilles and Hector can have arisen from myths of the dawn. Characters that stand out so firmly drawn, so human and so natural, in the gallery of human portraiture, can hardly have been shaped out of such skyey materials. One could as readily believe that Othello or Macbeth had such an origin.

It is easy to laugh at those early fancies which men dreamed in the childhood of the world, and took for truth; and to congratulate ourselves that we, with our modern lights of Science, have long outgrown those mythic fables; but with the exacter knowledge of the world's mechanism which Science has taught us, is there not something we have lost? Whither has gone that fine wonder with which the first men gazed on the earth and the heavens from the plains of Iran and Chaldea? It lies buried beneath the mass of second-

hand thought and information which Science has heaped upon us. Would it not be well if we could win back the truth, of which a dull mechanical or merely logical way of thinking has long robbed us, that the outward world, with all its movements, is not a mere dead machine, going by ropes and pulleys and cog-wheels, but an organism full of a mysterious life, which defies our most subtle analysis, and escapes us when placed in the crucible? This feeling, that things are alive and not dead, rests at the bottom of all mythology, the one root of truth underlying the huge mass of fable. How to regain this perception of something divine in Nature, more than eye and ear discover, and to do this in harmony with all the facts and laws which Science has ascertained, this is a problem reserved for thoughtful men in the future time.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH POETS DEAL WITH NATURE.

THOSE who have not given attention to the subject are apt to imagine that the chief creators of mythological fables were the poets, and especially Homer. They suppose that the early poets, by sheer power of imagination, invented those stories to adorn their poems, and so gave them currency among the people. It was not so. Even Homer, the earliest poet whom we know, belonged to an era when the myth-creating instinct was past its prime, and already on the wane. The fables of the gods, their loves and their quarrels, as these appear in his poems, there is no reason to suppose that he created them or imagined them for the first time. It would rather seem that they had been long current in popular belief, and that he only used and gave expression to stories which he found ready-made. Here and there in Homer you may still detect some traces of the mythologizing tendency still lingering, and catch the primitive physical meaning of the myth shining through the anthropomorphic covering which it afterward assumed. Such glimpses we

get in Zeus, when he gathers the clouds in the sky, when he rouses himself to snow upon men and manifests his feathery shafts, when he rains continuously, when he bows the heavens and comes down upon the peaks of Ida. Or again, when Poseidon, the earth-encompassing, the earth-shaker, yokes his car at Hegeæ and drives full upon the Trojan strand: I take the passage from Mr. Cordery's translation of the Iliad: —

> "He entered in,
> And there beneath his chariot drew to yoke
> Fast-flying horses, maned with flowing gold,
> Hooved with bright brass; and girt himself in gold,
> Took golden goad, and sprang upon the car;
> So forth upon the billows, round whose path
> Huge monsters gamboled, gathering from the depth
> Afar, anear, and joyous knew their lord;
> Ocean for gladness stood in sunder cloven,
> Whilst lightly flew the steeds, nor 'neath the car
> The burnished axle moistened with the brine: —
> Thus tow'rd the fleet his coursers bore the god."

Here we have, half-physical, half-mythological, like Milton's half-created lion, the fore part perfect, the hinder part still clay, a well-known natural appearance. After the storm-winds are laid, but while the sea still feels their power, it is thus that the high-crested breakers may be seen racing shorewards with their white manes backward streaming, and glorified with rainbow hues from a bright dawn or a splendid sunset poured upon them from the land.

But for the most part, even Homer, early poet though he was, has quite forgotten that original

aspect of Nature out of which each god was shaped, and has invested them with entirely human attributes, even with human follies and vices, which have no connection at all with the primary fact, but are the wildest freaks of extravagant fancy. If then even Homer has so much forgotten the physical origin of his mythic gods, how must it be with the tragic poets! Æschylus and Sophocles we see have entirely put aside the immoral fables about them, and are anxious to find the truth which lies at the root of the popular belief, and to moralize the whole conception of the gods. When we come down to the Latin poets, we do not find even this effort; but the gods they have borrowed from Greece are used as mere poetic machines, with as little of either physical or moral meaning as a modern romance-writer might use fairies, gnomes, or hobgoblins.

Although in the more imaginative of modern poets, modes of conceiving Nature, and expressions every here and there crop out, which in an earlier age would certainly have flowered into mythology, it is nevertheless true that, ever since the literary age set in, poets in general have viewed Nature with a more familiar eye, and described it in language which ordinary speech would not disown. I shall now endeavor to classify the several ways in which Nature is dealt with by the poets, the several aspects of it which enter most prominently into Poetry. It will be enough for my present purpose merely to generalize, under a few

heads, the most obvious of these forms, without attempting to analyze them or to account for them.

I. The first form I shall notice is the expression of that simple, spontaneous, unreflecting pleasure which all unsophisticated beings feel in free open-air life. We all know how children feel when they are let loose to wander at will in green fields, or by a burn-side, or under the budding woods when the primroses and anemones first appear. The full-grown man, too, the man of business or letters, knows how — when his nerves have been over-strung and his heart fretted by worldly things — a day abroad under a blue sky, with a soft southwest blowing, restores and harmonizes him. Old persons, we may have observed, who have seen and suffered much, from whom the world and its interests are receding: what a sense of peace and refreshment comes over them as they gaze in quiet over a distant landscape with the sunlight upon it!

This delight, which children, busy men, and weary age alike find in out-of-door life, may be said to be merely physical, a thing of the nerves and animal spirits. It is so, no doubt, but it is something more. Along with pleasure to the senses, there enters in something more ethereal, not the less real because it may be undefinable. This fresh child-like delight in Nature has found expression abundantly in the poets, especially in

The woodweel sang and would not cease,
Sitting upon the spray,
So loud he wakened Robin Hood,
In greenwood where he lay."

Suchlike utterances of ballad-writers and early poets might be multiplied without number. It is a penalty we have to pay for our late and over-stimulated civilization that such direct and unreflecting expressions of gladness in the face of Nature seem hardly any longer possible for a poet. If he will be listened to by our jaded, sophisticated ears, it is not enough for him to utter once again the spontaneous gladness that human hearts feel, and always will feel, in the pleasant air and the sunshine; he must say something about it which shall be novel, and out of the way, something subtle or analytic, or strongly stimulative. And yet it cannot but be that a poet who has a heart keenly sensitive to the common sights of earth and sky, and who describes these with the direct freshness which feeling heart and clear eye always give, may still do much to win back men from over-subtilizing, and to make them feel as if they have never felt before —

"The simple, the sincere delight,
The habitual scene of hill and dale,
The rural herds, the vernal gale,
The tangled vetches' purple bloom,
The fragrance of the bean's perfume."

II. The second method I shall mention is that of using Nature as a background or setting to

human action or emotion, — just as we see Raphael and other old masters, in their pictures of a Holy Family, bring in behind the human groups a far-off mountain line, with a piece of blue sky or some streaks of sunset above it.

This is the way in which Nature is very frequently used by Homer in the Iliad, and, especially, in the Odyssey. It is as a frame or setting to his pictures of human action and character. And closely allied to this is the way of illustrating the actions, the feelings, sometimes the sufferings, of men, by striking similes taken from the most obvious appearances of the outward world, or from the doing of wild creatures in Nature. This is a use of Nature in which the Iliad of Homer especially abounds, although all poets down to our own day have freely employed it. In the Iliad there is little or no description of the scenes in which the battles are fought. The features are hinted at by single epithets, such as many-fountained Ida, windy Ilion, deep-whirlpooled Scamander, and the presence of Nature you are made to feel by images fetched straight from every element, — from the clouds, the mountain-top, the woody crag, the forest, the sea darkening under the western breeze, the midnight sky with the moon and the stars shining in its depths.

But there is in the Iliad no dwelling on the features of the scenes through which the heroes pass, such as you find in the Odyssey and in the

Æneid. In these last, more than in the Iliad, Nature is used as the regular framework in which human actions are set. I cannot now stay to quote passages. We shall in the sequel see how large a place is filled, how much of Nature is let in upon the reader by Homer in his similes, which are almost all taken from common occurrences in Nature or from the working of man with Nature. Sometimes, however, we are made to feel the presence of Nature by other methods than that of simile. In the thick of the great battle in the 11th Book of the Iliad, just before Agamemnon breaks forth in his splendid charge, how the mind is relieved by this glance aside from the heat and hurry of the battle to the cool and quiet of this woodland scene: —

> "All through the dawn, and as the day grew on
> From either side the shafts were showered amain,
> And fast the people fell. But at the hour
> When the lone woodman in the mountain glens
> Prepares his noonday meal, for that his arms
> Are weary with long labor, and his heart
> Had had its fill of felling the tall treen,
> And craving for sweet food comes over him;
> Just at that hour the Danai by sheer might
> Broke through their foemen's ranks, each shouting loud
> To cheer his comrade on. First from the van
> Forth-leaping, Agamemnon slew a chief,
> Bienor,"

and then he presses on through the Trojan host, to slay, and slay, and slay.

III. Akin to this, and yet distinct from it, is

the way of regarding Nature through the light of the human and especially the historic events which it has witnessed, and with which some particular spots have become indelibly associated. This, which I may call the historic coloring of Nature, has been, of course, the slow accretion of the ages, and only in quite modern times is it a prominent feature in the poets. The poets of Greece and Rome, proud as they were of the deeds of their countrymen, do not seem to have visited their great battle-fields nor to have hung on the scenery that surrounded them with that romantic interest which modern poets do. Marathon, Thermopylæ, Salamis, names of glory as they were, and often on their lips, became to the Greek imagination names for deeds, abstractions of national achievement, rather than actual localities to be visited and gazed on for their own sakes and for the memories they enshrined. It is an English, not a Greek, poet who seizes the great features of the immortal plain, and sings —

> "The mountains look on Marathon,
> And Marathon looks on the sea."

The same, too, who, alluding to the great sea-fight, gives the scenery also: —

> "A king sat on the rocky brow
> That looks o'er sea-born Salamis,
> And ships in thousands lay below,
> And men in nations all were his.
> He counted them at break of day,
> And when the sun set where were they?"

Perhaps of all modern poets Walter Scott is the one who has looked on the earth most habitually as seen through the coloring with which historic events and great historic names have invested it. It is not only that he has in his romantic epics described the actual features of the fields of Flodden and of Bannockburn with a minuteness foreign to the genius of the ancients. He has done this. But, besides, wherever he set his foot in his native land — not in a battle-field alone, but by ruined keep or solitary moor, or rocky seashore or western island — there rose before his eye the human forms either of the heroic past or of the lowlier peasantry, and if no actual record hung among them, his imagination supplied the want, and peopled the places with characters appropriate, which shall remain interwoven with the very features of the scenes while the name of Scotland lasts.

> "For thou upon a hundred streams,
> By tales of love and sorrow,
> Of faithful love, undaunted truth,
> Hast shed the power of Yarrow."

In some men, not wanting in imagination, the only aspect in which scenery interests them is when it is linked to history. This is conspicuously seen in Lord Macaulay. Of him his biographer writes: — "The leading features of a tract of country impressed themselves rapidly and indelibly on his observation; all its associations and traditions swept at once across his

memory; and every line of good poetry which its fame or its beauty had inspired rose almost involuntarily to his lips. But compared with the wealth of phrase on which he could draw at will when engaged on the description of human passions, catastrophes, and intrigues, his stock of epithets applicable to mountains, seas, and clouds was singularly scanty, and he had no ambition to enlarge it. When he had recorded the fact, that the leaves were green, the sky blue, and the plain rich, and the hills clothed with wood, he had said all he had to say, and there was an end of it." — That is, Macaulay's imagination was confined to human and historic things, and was irresponsive to the direct touch of Nature.

But it is not only by such localized history or romance as Scott has given, that this human coloring passes into the impassive earth. There is another more subtle way in which it works, and it is this: — Wherever men have been upon the earth, even when they have done no memorable deeds, and left no history behind them, they have lived and they have died, they have joyed and they have sorrowed; and the sense that men have been there and disappeared leaves a pathos on the face of many a now unpeopled solitude.

Those will know what I mean who ever have wandered alone through moors or glens in the Highlands, where once the old clansmen had their homes, but whence they have long departed.

Have they not felt, as they gazed on these wildernesses, where perhaps not even a weathered gable now tells of man, that the outlines of Nature's lineaments were touched with pensiveness indescribable by the atmosphere of foregone humanities that overspread them? Such are the feelings that are awakened as, far up in the lap of the highest Bens, you come on the green spots where the former Celtic people had their summer shielings. In Wordsworth's "Tour in Scotland"[1] it is noticed feelingly, as we might expect: —

"At the top of a mountain encircled by higher mountains at a distance, we were passing without notice a heap of scattered stones, round which was a belt of green grass — green, and as it seemed rich — where all else was either poor heather or coarse grass, or unprofitable rushes and spongy moss. The Highlander made a pause, saying, 'This place is much changed since I was here twenty years ago.' He told us that the heap of stones had been a hut, where a family was then living, who had their winter habitation in the valley, and brought their goats thither in the summer to feed on the mountains, and that they were used to gather them together at night and morning to be milked close to the door, which was the reason why the grass was yet so green near the stones. It was affecting in that solitude to meet with this memorial of manners passed

[1] Miss Wordsworth, p. 228.

away. We looked about for some other traces of humanity, but nothing else could we find in that place."

Again: "We came to several deserted mountain huts or shiels, and rested for some time beside one of them, upon a hillock of its green plot of monumental herbage. The spot of ground where we sat was even beautiful, the grass being uncommonly verdant, and of a remarkably soft and silky texture." The poet, his sister tells, then felt how fitting a subject for poetry there was in those affecting "relics of human society found in that grand and solitary region."

IV. Another way in which poets and others deal with Nature is when the heart, under the stress of some strong emotion, colors all Nature with its own hues, sees all things in sympathy with its own mood, making

> "All melodies an echo of that voice,
> All colors a suffusion from that light."

This feeling has been expressed in a very natural way by Sir Walter Scott: —

> "Who says, that when the Poet dies
> Mute Nature mourns her worshiper,
> And celebrates his obsequies;
> Who says, tall cliff and cavern lone
> For the departed Bard make moan;
> That mountains weep in crystal rill;
> That flowers in tears of balm distill;
> Through his loved groves that breezes sigh,
> And oaks in deeper groans reply;
> And rivers teach their rushing wave
> To murmur dirges round his grave."

This view of Nature has been philosophically condensed into a single stanza of Coleridge's ode on Dejection. He says, that in looking at the outward world

> "We receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone doth Nature live;
> Ours is the wedding garment, ours the shroud."

And then he goes on to say that if in Nature we would see

> "Aught of higher worth
> From the soul itself must issue forth
> A light, a glory, a fair luminous mist
> Enveloping the Earth.
> And from the soul itself must there be sent
> A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
> Of all sweet sounds the life and element."

Now the thought here expressed, false if taken as an adequate explanation of our whole attitude towards Nature, is eminently true of certain moods of mind when we are under strong excitement. It is not true that Nature is a blank or an unintelligible scroll, with no meaning of its own but that which we put into it from the light of our own transient feelings. But it is most true that we are often so absorbed in our own inward moods that we cannot for the time see anything in the outward world but that which our eye, colored by the emotion, sends into it.

On this subject Mr. Ruskin discourses eloquently and subtly in a chapter in the third volume of his "Modern Painters," to which I would refer those interested in these matters. He calls

the tendency to make Nature sympathize with our own present feelings "The Pathetic Fallacy." His view of the matter is this: "that the temperament which is subject to the Pathetic Fallacy is that of a mind and body overborne by feeling, and too weak (for the time) to deal fully and truthfully with what is before them or upon them." He points out that "this state is more or less noble according to the force and elevation of the emotion which has caused it; but at its best, if the poet is so overpowered as to color his descriptions by it, then it is morbid and a sign of weakness. For the emotions have vanquished the intellect." It is, he says, "a higher order of mind, in which the intellect rises and asserts itself along with the utmost tension of passion, and when the whole man can stand in an iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight." Mr. Ruskin further says (p. 164), "There are four classes of men — the men who feel nothing, and therefore see truly. [He might rather have said, and therefore see nothing.] The men who feel strongly, think weakly, and see untruly (second order of poets). The men who feel strongly, think strongly, and see truly (first order of poets). And the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them." This last he calls "the usual condition of prophetic inspiration."

It will be conceded to Mr. Ruskin that it is not the highest order of poet who, as he looks out on Nature, is so overmastered by his emotions as to be continually coloring it with his own mental hues. It is higher to feel intensely and still think truly, than merely to feel intensely without true thought. But Mr. Ruskin would allow that for the poet, whether dramatic, epic, or other, to represent his characters as coloring the world with their own excited feelings, is neither falsity nor weakness, but is merely keeping true to a fact of human nature. Numerous instances of this will occur to every one. Take one from Shakespeare's delineations of character. Ariel, breaking through the elements and powers of Nature, quickens the remorse of Alonso, king of Naples, for a crime committed twelve years before, till the sounds of Nature become the voice of conscience —

> "Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;
> The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,
> That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
> The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass,
> Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded, and
> I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
> And with him there lie mudded."

V. Connected with this last mode of treating Nature, but connected in the way of contrast, is what I may call the Inhuman and Infinite side of Nature — that side which yields no response to man's yearnings, and refuses to make itself plastic under even the strongest power of emotion.

For as I have elsewhere said,[1] outside of and beyond man, aloof from his warm hopes and fears, his joy and sorrow, his strivings and aspirations, there lies the vast immensity of Nature's forces, which pays him no homage and yields him no sympathy. This aspect of Nature may be seen even in the tamest landscape, if we look to the clouds or the stars above us, or to the ocean-waves that roar around our shores —

> "Those clouds that far above us float and pause,
> Whose pathless march no mortal may control,
> Those ocean-waves that, wheresoe'er they roll,
> Yield homage only to eternal laws."

But nowhere is it so borne in upon man as in the wilderness where no man is, in the presence of the great mountains which seem so impassive and unchangeable. Their strength and permanence so contrast with man, of few years and full of trouble — they are altogether heedless of his feelings or his destiny. He may smile or weep, he may live or die; they care not. They are the same in all their ongoings, come what may to him. They respond to the sunrises and the sunsets, but not to his emotions. All the same they fulfill their mighty functions, careless though no human eye should ever look on them. Man's heart may be full of gladness, yet Nature frowns: he goes forth from the death-chamber, and Nature affronts him with sunshine and the song of birds —

[1] Essay on Keble.

> "Nature, an infinite, unfeeling power
> From some great centre moving evermore,
> Keepeth no festal-day when man is born,
> And hath no tears for his mortality."

It seems as though she marched on, having a purpose of her own inaccessible to man; she keeps her own secret, and drops no hint to him. This side of things, whether philosophically or imaginatively regarded, seems to justify the saying that "the visible world still remains without its divine interpretation." And though inexplicable, perhaps for its very inexplicability, this mysterious silence, this inexorable deafness, this inhuman indifference of Nature, has oppressed the imagination of some of the greatest poets with a vague but sublime awe. The sense of it lay heavy on Lucretius and Shelley, sometimes on Wordsworth, and drew out of their souls some of the profoundest music. At the present time, perhaps from the increased scientific knowledge of Nature's processes, this contrast between the warm and tender human heart, and the cold and impassive, almost relentless, elements, more than ever before dominates the imaginations of men.

VI. A sixth mode of poetically treating Nature is that which we meet with in purely descriptive poetry. In Hesiod, in Theocritus, in the Georgics of Virgil, among the ancients, we have examples of pure description interwoven in didactic and idyllic poetry; but it is in modern times that this

kind of poetry has chiefly asserted itself. The most striking example of it is Thomson's "Seasons." There we find that man is quite subordinate, and only comes in to set off Nature and its appearances, which form the main object of the poem. As it may seem to be one of the simplest ways of treating Nature, merely to describe it, — to picture what the eye sees and the ear hears, — faithfully to reproduce the forms and colors of things, the movements and the sounds which pervade them — perhaps some may think it should have been the earliest method. But as a fact, this kind of poetry, which seems so simple, is the product only of a late age. Early poets hardly ever handle Nature except to interweave it with human action and emotion, and as set-off against the life of man. To regard it by itself, and as existing apart from man, is the mental attitude of a late and cultivated time, even though the descriptions may seem to be plain and unadorned.

Since writing these sentences, I have read in Mr. Stopford Brooke's admirable "English Literature Primer" a passage in which he attributes the earliest efforts at poetry of natural description to Scotch poets, and among these especially to Gawain Douglas, early in the sixteenth century; and then he, in another place, points out how, when this kind of poetry came prominently forward in more modern times, it was a Scottish poet who led the way in it. This is what he says: —

"Natural scenery had been hitherto only used as a background to the picture of human life. It now (that is, in the first thirty years of the eighteenth century) began to take a much larger place in poetry, and, after a time, grew to occupy a distinct place of its own apart from man. The best natural description we have before the time of Pope is that of two Puritans, Marvell and Milton. But the first poem devoted to natural description appeared while Pope was yet alive, in the very midst of a vigorous town poetry. It was the "Seasons," 1726–30; and it is curious, remembering what I have said about the peculiar turn of the Scotch for natural description, that it was the work of James Thomson, a Scotchman. He described the scenery and country-life of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. He wrote with his eye upon their scenery, and, even when he wrote of it in his room, it was with "a recollected love." The descriptions were too much like catalogues, the very fault of the previous Scotch poets; and his style was always heavy, and often cold, but he was the first poet who led the English people into that new world of nature in poetry, which has moved and enchanted us in the works of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, but which was entirely impossible for Pope to understand. The impulse Thomson gave was soon followed."

In our own day such poetic descriptions of Nature have burst the bonds of metre altogether,

and filled many a splendid page of poetic or imaginative prose. Many instances of this will occur to every one. Preëminent among these are Mr. Ruskin's elaborate word-pictures of natural scenery.

But of all poetic description of Nature, it may be said that if it is to reach any high level it cannot proceed calmly and unexcitedly after the manner of an inventory. No eye can see deeply into the meaning of Nature unless it has also looked as deeply into the recesses of the human heart, and felt the full gravity of man's life and destiny. It is only when seen over against these that Nature renders back her profounder tones.

VII. There is another way in which the poet deals with the external world, — when he enters into the life and the movement of Nature by a kind of imaginative sympathy, and brings it home to us by one stroke, flashing upon our hearts by one touch, one inspired line, a sense of the inner life of things, and a conviction that he has been allowed for a moment to penetrate into their secret. This, which has been called, in a special way, the interpretative power of Poetry, is that in which it reaches its highest function, and exercises one of its finest offices of mediation between the soul of man and Nature.

No one, as far as I know, has seen this aspect of Poetry more truly, or expressed it so felicitously, as my friend Mr. Matthew Arnold. If

he has not been the first to notice it, he has certainly dwelt on it with more emphasis than any previous writer, as far as I know. For his views on this subject I would refer to his delightful Essay on Maurice de Guérin, in his volume entitled "Essays on Criticism."

As it is well to give a good thought in its best possible form, Mr. Arnold will, I know, forgive me if I quote at length his own words. He says: —

"The grand power of Poetry is its interpretative power, by which I mean, not the power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the Universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us as to objects without us, we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them; and this feeling calms and satisfies us as no other can. . . . . Poetry indeed interprets in another way besides this; but one of its two ways of interpreting is by awakening this sense in us. The interpretations of Science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of Poetry give it; they appeal to a limited faculty, and not to the whole man."

Again Mr. Arnold says: —

"Poetry interprets in two ways: it interprets by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and it interprets by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature. In other words, Poetry is interpretative by having natural magic in it, and by having moral profundity. In both ways it illuminates man; it gives him a satisfying sense of reality; it reconciles him with himself and the Universe. The greatest poets unite in themselves the faculty of both kinds of interpretation, the naturalistic and the moral. But it is observable that in the poets who unite both kinds, the latter (the moral) usually ends by making itself the master. In Shakespeare the two kinds seem wonderfully to balance each other; but even in him the balance leans; his expression tends to become too little sensuous and simple, too much intellectualized. The same thing may be yet more strongly affirmed of Lucretius and of Wordsworth."

It is not, however, with moral but with naturalistic interpretation that we have now to do. And in this faculty of naturalistic interpretation, perhaps no poet — certainly no modern poet — equals Keats. In him, as Mr. Arnold says, "the faculty is overpowingly predominant. The natural magic is perfect; when he speaks of the outward world he speaks almost like Adam naming, by Divine inspiration, the creatures; his ex-

pression corresponds with the thing's essential reality."

Does not Keats thus bring home to us the meaning — the inner secret — of the ocean, and the impression it makes on the human heart, when he speaks of

> "The voice mysterious, which whoso hears
> Must think on what will be, and what has been?"

It is he that interprets the meaning of the summer midnight among the woods, when he says —

> "Upon a tranced summer night
> Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave."

Or take one more instance. All know the stern, almost grim, feeling of solitude about some little crag-engirdled lochan or tarn far up the heart of a Highland mountain. Who has given this feeling of grim solitude, so death-like that any living thing or sound startles you there, as Wordsworth, by these two strokes? —

> "There sometimes doth a leaping fish
> Send through the tarn a lonely cheer;
> The crags repeat the raven's croak
> In symphony austere."

Or again, who has not felt as though he had a new revelation made to him about the starry sky and the mountain-stillness after reading for the first time these two well-known lines? —

"The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

Or once more: who has so called up the impression produced by the sound of waters heard among the mountains as Wordsworth, when he thus speaks? —

"In mute repose
To lie and listen to the mountain-flood
Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves."

But I have dwelt too long on this aspect of Poetry, its penetrating power of naturalistic interpretation when the poet,

"With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,"

is given to see into the life of things, and seeing, makes us share his insight, makes us partakers for a moment at least in

"That blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened."

Even if it be but a transient glance, a momentary lightening of the burden that he lends us, it is one of the most intimate and delicate services — one of the highest and rarest functions which the poet or any man can perform.

VIII. Once more: the last and highest way in which Nature ministers to the soul and spirit of man is when it becomes to him a symbol translucent with the light of the moral and spiritual

world. Or, in other words, the highest use to which Imagination can put this visible world is, to gather from it some tidings of the world invisible.

This use is seen when the sights and sounds of Nature, coming in through eye and ear to the soul, hint at and foreshow "a higher life than this daily one, a brighter world than that we see." It is Coleridge who has said that "it has been the music of gentle and pious minds in all ages, it is the poetry of all human life, to read the book of Nature in a figurative sense, and to find therein correspondences and symbols of the spiritual world." That this is no mere fanciful use to make of Nature, that in cultivating the habit of thus reading it we are cultivating a power which is grounded in reason and the truth of things, can hardly be doubted, if we believe that the things we see, and the mind that sees them, have one common origin, come from one Universal Mind, which gives being to and upholds both alike. This seeing of spiritual truths mirrored in the face of Nature rests not on any fancied, but in a real analogy between the natural and the spiritual worlds. They are, in some sense which Science has not ascertained, but which the vital and religious imagination can perceive, counterparts the one of the other The highest authority for this belief, as well as its truest exemplification, we have in the Parables of our Lord. It was on this truth that He grounded a large part of his teaching.

I need but allude to what is so familiar; only let us, before we pass on, think of what is implied in this teaching, which we have all known from our childhood, — the growth of the Divine life in the soul represented by the growth of the corn seed in the furrow, the end of the world or of this æon set forth by the reapers and the harvest. Simple as this teaching is, level to the child's capacity, it yet involves a truth that lies deeper than any philosopher has yet penetrated, even the hidden bond that connects things visible with things invisible.

Archbishop Trench has said well on this subject:[1] — "On this rests the possibility of a real and not a merely arbitrary teaching by Parables — that the world of Nature is throughout a witness for the world of spirit, proceeding from the same hand, growing out of the same root, and constituted for that very end. All lovers of truth readily acknowledge these mysterious harmonies. To them the things on earth are copies of the things in heaven. They know that the earthly tabernacle is made after the pattern of things seen in the Mount, and the question of the Angel in Milton often forces itself on their meditations —

> 'What if earth
> Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
> Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?'"

But to leave these heights of inspired teaching,

[1] *Trench on Parables*, p. 13.

we find everywhere the more meditative poets deriving from visible Nature hints at that which eye has not seen nor ear heard. One of the simplest and most child-like instances of this that occurs to me is that beautiful thought of Isaac Walton: —

> "How joyed my heart in the rich melodies
> That overhead and round me did arise!
> The moving leaves — the waters' gentle flow —
> Delicious music hung on every bough.
> Then said I, in my heart, If that the Lord
> Such lovely music on the earth accord;
> If to weak sinful man such sounds are given —
> Oh! what must be the melody of Heaven!"

Something of the same thought comes out in a more reflective way in many of the poems of Henry Vaughan,[1] a writer of the same age as Walton, and one, like him, now less known and read than he deserves to be. Take the following, in which Vaughan speaks of the vivid insight of his childhood in a strain in which some have thought that they overheard the first note of that tone which Wordsworth has sounded more fully in his "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality. It is thus Vaughan speaks of his childhood: —

> "Happy those early days when I
> Shined in my angel-infancy;
> When yet I had not walked above
> A mile or two from my first love,
> And looking back, at that short space,
> Could see a glimpse of *His* bright face;
> When on some gilded cloud or flower
> My gazing soul would dwell an hour,

[1] Born 1621, died 1695.

> And in those weaker glories spy
> Some shadows of eternity;
> And feel through all this fleshly dress
> Bright shootes of everlastingness."

Such thoughts may be deemed by some to be fanciful and not practical. Certainly they are not much in vogue at the present time. But as one has said, "I cannot conceive a use of our knowledge more practical than to make it connect the sight of this world with the thought of another." Nor can any be more needed by us, or more consolatory. For is it not the experience of each individual as he grows more thoughtful, as well as the experience of the race, that the visible, the outward, cannot satisfy? Is it not the very best element in man that makes him feel forever after something higher, deeper, more enduring than the things he sees? If we turn aside from this tendency, and seek to quench it, we do so at the cost of destroying that which is the best, the noblest inheritance of our humanity, — the piece of divinity in us.

This suggestive power of Nature, and its unsufficingness, have been felt by all men who have any glimpse of the ideal in them; by none has it been more deeply felt, or more adequately expressed, than by him, the great preacher — poet as well as preacher — of our age. I mean, Dr. Newman. As the prose words in which he expresses this feeling are in the highest sense poetry, I cannot, I think, do better than give the

thought in his own perfect language. He is speaking in the opening of Spring: —

"Let these be your thoughts, especially in this Spring season, when the whole face of Nature is so rich and beautiful. Once only in the year, yet once, does the world which we see show forth its hidden powers, and in a manner manifest itself. Then there is a sudden rush and burst outwardly of that hidden life which God has lodged in the material world. Well, that shows you, as by a sample, what it can do at his command, when He gives the word. This earth which now buds forth in leaves and blossoms, will one day burst forth into a new world of light and glory. Who would think, except from his experience of former Springs all through his life, who could conceive two or three months before that it was possible that the face of Nature, which then seemed so lifeless, should become so splendid and varied? How different is a prospect when leaves are on it, and off it! How unlikely it would seem before the event that the dry and naked branches should suddenly be clothed with what is so bright and so refreshing! Yet in God's good time leaves come on the trees. The season may delay, but come it will at last.

"So it is with the coming of that eternal Spring for which all Christians are waiting. Come it will, though it delay. Therefore we say day by day, Thy kingdom come; which means, O Lord, show thyself — manifest thyself. The earth that

we see does not satisfy us ; it is but a beginning ; it is but a promise of something beyond it ; even when it is gayest, with all its blossoms on, and shows most touchingly what lies hid in it, yet it is not enough. We know much more lies hid in it than we see. . . . . What we see is the outward shell of an eternal kingdom, and on that kingdom we fix the eyes of our faith. . . . . Bright as is the sun and sky and the clouds, green as are the leaves and the fields, sweet as is the singing of the birds, we know that they are not all, and we will not take up with a part for the whole. They proceed from a centre of love and goodness, which is God himself, but they are not his fullness ; they speak of heaven, but they are not heaven ; they are but as stray beams and dim reflections of his image ; they are but crumbs from the table. We are looking for the coming of the day of God, when all this outward world, fair though it be, shall perish. . . . . We can bear the loss, for we know it will be but the removing of a veil. We know, that to remove the world which is seen will be the manifestation of the world which is not seen. We know that what we see is a screen hiding from us God and Christ, and his saints and angels ; and we earnestly desire and pray for the dissolution of all that we see, from our longing after that which we do not see."

Such are the thoughts and longings which the sight of the vernal earth can awaken in a spiritual mind well used to heavenly meditations.

If some of us are so sense-bound that such thoughts seem fantastic and unreal to them, all that can be said is, The more 's the pity. Even the best among us will probably not venture to appropriate such thoughts as if these were our habitual companions, but they may have in some brighter moments known them. At all events they know what they mean, and are assured that as they themselves grow in spirituality, the beauty that clothes this visible world, while it soothes, does not suffice, but becomes more and more the hint and prophecy of a higher beauty which their heart longs for.

And now, in looking back on these several ways in which poets have handled Nature, two thoughts suggest themselves : —

1. The ways I have noted are far from exhausting all the possible or even actual modes in which poets deal with Nature, or, in other words, in which Nature lends itself to the poet's service. They are but a few of the most prominent and obvious. It may interest some to look for others, and to add them to the classification here given.

2. Though one mode may be more prominent in one poet, and one in another, yet no poet is limited to only one, or even two, of these several ways of adapting Nature to his purposes. In the works of the greatest poets, those of largest and most varied range, perhaps every one of these modes, and more besides, may be found. To find out and arrange under heads all the ways in which

say Shakespeare and Milton deal with Nature, would be an interesting study for any one who is young, and has leisure for it.

With one reflection I close this part of my subject. Any one who has ever been brought to meditate on the relation which the abstractions of mathematics bear to the Laws of Nature must have felt how exceeding wonderful it is. A system of thought evoked out of pure intelligence has been found reflected and, as it were, embodied in the actual movements of the heavenly bodies, and bringing the whole Physical Cosmos within the power of man's thought —

> "From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere,
> From system on to system, without end."

Such a one, I say, must have been filled with wonder at this marvelous adaptation and correspondence between the mind of transitory man and the vast movements of the most remote and permanent of material things.

A like, though a different, wonder must arise when we reflect how, in the various modes above noted, and no doubt in many more, outward Nature lends itself to be the material in which so many of man's highest thoughts and emotions can work and embody themselves.

Of the poets and this visible world we may truly say, —

> "They took the whole earth for their toy,
> They played with it in every mood;
> A cell for prayer, a hall for joy,
> They treated Nature as they would."

He who has once perceived the wonderful adaptation which exists between the mind of man and the external world — how exquisitely the individual mind, as well as the mind of the race, is fitted to the world, and the external world fitted to the mind, — if he has once vividly felt the reality of this adaptation, he must have paused in wonder at himself, and at the world that encompasses him, and become penetrated with an immediate conviction, deeper than all arguments can reach, that the reasonable soul within him, and the material world without him, which on so many sides is seen to be the embodiment of reason, and which yields up its secret to man's intelligence, and is so plastic to his imagination and emotions, — that these two existences so answering to each other, and so strangely communing with each other, are both rooted in the one Central and Universal Intelligence which embraces and upholds both Nature and Man.

CHAPTER IX.

NATURE IN HEBREW POETRY, AND IN HOMER.

THE method pursued in this book has been, beginning with some general views, from these to descend to special illustrations, in order to exemplify what has been said of Poetry in a general way, by pointing to the several methods which the poets have actually followed in delineating Nature and her aspects.

It will be but to carry out somewhat more in detail the same procedure if I now adduce a few samples of the way in which some of the greatest poets of each age and country have in their works shown their feeling towards Nature. To exhaust this subject would require a large treatise. A chapter or two is all that can here be afforded to it. In glancing thus, which is all we can do, at a few of the great mountain-summits of song, many a lesser elevation in the long line of poetry, that might well repay attention, must needs be passed in silence. I shall begin with the earliest poets we know, and come down to those near our own time. In such a survey it is to the East that the eye naturally turns, and there especially to the singers of Israel; for, as to the view of

Nature which the Hindu Vedas may contain, this is a subject on which I do not venture, since at best I could but repeat at second-hand what others have said.

In considering the views of Nature presented by Hebrew poetry, it is not to the account of the creation in Genesis that we turn, but to the many passages in the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Book of Job, in which the aspects of the outward world, as they appeared to those old seers, are delineated. Humboldt and many others have remarked that the description by the Hebrew Poets of the material world everywhere reflects their faith in the unity of God, and in his immediate presence in all creation. The world is described, not so much in detail, but as a whole, in its vast expanses and great movements; or, if individual objects are dwelt on, as in the Book of Job, it is as the visible witnesses to the transcendent power of the Invisible One. Nature is nowhere spoken of as an independent and self-subsistent power, but rather as the outer chamber of an Unseen Presence — a garment, a veil, which the Eternal One is ever ready to break through. These characteristics, which pervade the entire poetry of the Old Testament, are perhaps nowhere seen so condensed as in that crowning hymn of the visible creation, the 104th Psalm.

This Psalm presents, as has often been remarked, a picture of the entire Universe, which for completeness, for breadth, and for grandeur, is

unequaled in any other literature. Where else, in human language, shall we find the whole Universe, the heavens and the earth, and the ongoings of man in the midst of them, sketched, as here, in a "few bold strokes"? —

"The Lord covereth himself with light as with a garment. He hath stretched the heavens like a canopy. He laid the foundation of the round world that it should not be removed forever. The waters springing in the mountains descend into the valleys, unto the places which the Lord hath appointed for them, that they may never pass the bounds which He hath set them. He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills, to give drink to every beast of the field, for the wild asses to quench their thirst. . . . Beside them the birds of the air sing among the branches." The fruits of the field, too, are there; grass and green herb; the labors of man, wine and oil of olive; all the creatures, the conies, the wild goats, the lions roaring after their prey, and seeking their meat from God. There, too, is the great and wide sea, and the wondrous creatures it contains, and the heavenly bodies are rounding in the whole. And then that touching contrast between the moving life of the elements and the quiet yet laborious life of man, encompassed by these vast movements, — "Man goeth forth unto his work and his labor until the evening." And all this picture of the Universe contained within thirty-five short verses! Besides

this, the special Psalm of the visible creation, there is the 65th Psalm, and many another passage in the Psalms, which describe so touchingly the way in which God deals with the earth through natural processes.

Again, I need hardly refer to the Book of Job, especially from the 37th to the 41st chapters, where both single appearances of the world and the arrangement of the whole are depicted in language which has graven itself on the heart of all nations: "The Lord walks on the heights of the sea, on the ridges of the towering waves heaped up by the storm." Or again: "The morning dawn illumines the border of the earth, and moulds variously the canopy of clouds as the hand of man moulds the ductile clay."

Or turn again to the great poet-prophet Isaiah. Here you find no detailed descriptions, but all Nature fused and molten before the intense fire, now of his indignation, now of his adoring awe, now of his spiritual joy; one moment lifting his eyes to the midnight heavens as the proof and witness of the Divine Omnipotence; another, in his soul's exultation over God's redemptive mercy, calling aloud to the heavens to sing, and the lower parts of the earth to shout for joy, "Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest and every tree therein."

But this transport comes from no mere love of Nature. It has a deeper origin. It is for that Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will

have mercy upon his afflicted. This is the solemn spiritual joy in which he calls on the heavens and the earth to sympathize.

The following seem to be some of the chief notes of Hebrew poetry in its dealing with Nature: —

1. Nature, as we have seen, is never represented as an independent power or as resplendent with her own beauty, but as the direct creation, one might almost say, the garment of the great Jehovah. In fact it is remarkable that the word Nature, in the sense we now use it in, never occurs in the Bible. Neither the word nor the thing, as a separate entity, seems ever to have been present to the Hebrew mind. In everything they saw or heard God himself as immediately present, ready as it were to rend the veil and manifest himself.

2. The sober, truthful estimate of all things in the external world. They are spoken of exactly as they are. There is no temptation to make too much of them; for He who is behind them and who made them is so much greater, so much more present to thought, that reverence for Him precludes exaggeration. The accuracy of the Bible descriptions of these things is quite unexampled in other literature.[1] This faithfulness to fact, this veneration for natural truth, this feeling that things are too sacred to be exaggerated or distorted, or in any way trifled with, comes directly

[1] Dawson, *Nature and the Bible,* pp. 23, 24.

from the habit of regarding all visible Nature as created and continually upheld by One Omnipresent God. Habitual reverence for Him from whom they come sobers the writers and makes them truthful.

3. Connected with this is the absence of all tendency to theorize or frame hypotheses about Nature's ongoings. This of course comes from the pervading habit of referring all effects directly to the Divine will; and yet there is no want of philosophic wonder, for, as Humboldt remarks, the Book of Job proposes many questions about natural things "which modern science enables us to propound more formally, and to clothe in more scientific language, but not to solve satisfactorily." Lastly, there is a deep-hearted pathos, "a yearning pensiveness," as it has been called, in the Hebrew poetry, over man's mortal condition, as when in images straight from Nature it describes his life here as "a wind that passeth away and cometh not again," or "as a flower of the field so he flourisheth, for the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more." Simple images, yet how true for all generations!

HOMER.

When we turn from the Hebrew to the Greek poetry, as represented by the father of it, Homer, we find ourselves in another atmosphere. It is not merely that in the regard which the great poet casts on Nature, mythology, a fading and

only half-alive mythology, still lingered. It is not this only, but it is that in his thoughts of Nature there is not the same awful reverence, the same profound pathos; but there is more of the artistic sense of beauty, that artistic sense which is only fully developed when the profounder feelings are comparatively laid asleep.

No land known to the ancients, perhaps I might say no land ever known to men, has supplied such visual stimulus to the imagination as Greece; — scenery so richly diversified, a land beyond all others various in features and elements, mountains with their bases plunged into the sea, valleys intersected by great rivers, rich plains and meadows inlaid between the hill-ranges, deeply indented shores, promontories wood-clad or temple-crowned looking out on the many-islanded, Ægean; — around it, on every side, seas so beautiful, above it such a canopy of sky, changing through every hour and every season, and calling forth from sea and land every color which sunlight and gloom can elicit.

If of all nations the Greeks were endowed with the keenest sensibility to beauty, and if Homer was their chief and representative poet, it could hardly be but that scenery so varied should melt into his imagination and reflect itself in his poetry. And so it is. Homer lived most probably on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, where he had ever before his eye the island-studded Ægean, behind him the rich valleys opening down to the coast,

and eastward the great mountain ranges where these rivers are cradled; could it be that of all this his poetry should give no sign? I cannot agree with Mr. Ruskin's criticism of the Homeric scenery. You will find it in the third volume of his "Modern Painters," chapter xiii., on Classical Landscape. Like everything which Mr. Ruskin writes, it is interesting and suggestive, but I cannot think it adequate or wholly true. Of the Greeks he says: "They shrank with dread or hatred from all the ruggedness of lower nature — from the wrinkled forest bark and the jagged hill-crest, and irregular inorganic storm of sky, looking to these for the most part as adverse powers, and taking pleasure only in such portions of the lower world as were at once conducive to the rest and health of the human frame, and in harmony with the laws of its gentler beauty." Again he says: "As far as I recollect, without a single exception, every Homeric landscape, intended to be beautiful, is composed of a fountain, a meadow, and a shady grove." Again: "It is sufficiently notable that Homer, living in mountainous and rocky countries, dwells delightedly on all the flat bits; and so I think invariably the inhabitants of mountainous countries do; but the inhabitants of the plains do not, in any similar way, dwell delightedly on mountains."

Now, in this passage, the general assertion seems to be much too sweeping, and, in the special instance of Homer, I think it is not true.

Mr. Ruskin backs his position by reference to various passages in the Odyssey which seem to bear him out, but in any fair estimate we must take in the Iliad as well as the Odyssey.

In the Iliad the descriptions of Nature are not so detailed as in the Odyssey. Indeed, they occur almost entirely in similes; but these the poet fetches from every realm and feature of Nature — from the mountain, the forest, the sea, especially as seen darkening under the coming of the western breeze; from the cloudy and the midnight sky; from all kinds of wild animals, the lion, the fawn, the hawk, and the boar. In his battle-scenes it is to all the sterner and fiercer aspects of Nature, and habits of wild beasts, that he has recourse for his comparisons. And would he have so often invoked the aid of these wild forces and creatures of his imagination had not he delighted in them?

So when Teucer slays Mentor, it is thus, as rendered by Lord Derby: —

> "Down he fell,
> As by the woodman's axe, on some high peak
> Falls a proud ash, conspicuous from afar,
> Leveling its tender leaves upon the ground."

It is thus the charge of Hector is described when he beat back the Greeks and penned them at their ships: —

> "On poured the Trojan masses; in the van
> Hector straight forward drove in full career.
> As some huge bowlder, from its rocky bed
> Detached, and by the wintry torrent's force

Hurled down the steep cliff's face, when constant rains
The massive rock's firm hold have undermined ;
With giant bounds it flies ; the crashing wood
Resounds beneath it ; still it hurries on,
Until, arriving at the level plain,
Its headlong impulse checked, it rolls no more."

Or take another similitude drawn from the sea. When the poet wishes to describe how the Achæan phalanxes come on to battle, this is the image he employs : —

" And as a goatherd from his watch-tower crag
Beholds a cloud advancing o'er the sea
Beneath the west wind's breath ; as from afar
He gazes, black as pitch, it sweeps along
O'er the dark face of ocean, bearing on
A hurricane of rain ; he, shuddering, sees
And drives his flock beneath the sheltering cave.
So thick and dark about the Argives stirred,
Impatient for the war, the stalwart youths,
Black masses, bristling close with spear and shield."

Or again, when, after Agamemnon has retired wounded from the battle, Hector comes forth and slips his Trojans on the Achæan host, as some hunter slips his white-teethed hounds on a wild boar or a lion, and himself

" Fell on their battle, as some roaring storm
Leaps down and heaves the sleeping violet sea."

One after another he lays low the chiefs, and their names fill three hexameters.

" Of the leaders these
He slew, then on the nameless people fell,
As when with hurricane deep the west wind smites
White summer clouds high piled by the clear south,
And volumed wave on wave comes shoreward rolled,

And the white flying foam is scattered high
Before the loud blast of far-wandering wind."

Let me now give one instance of Homer's feeling for the aspect of the nightly heavens. It shall be taken from the place of the Iliad where the Trojans, after a day of successful battle, having driven back the Greeks, rest for the night. And here I shall quote, not, as in the above passage, from Lord Derby's translation, but from a rendering of the passage by the Poet-Laureate. It is the only passage of Homer in which we have the Laureate's handiwork: —

"So Hector said, and sea-like roared his host,
Then loosed their sweating horses from the yoke,
And each beside his chariot bound his own,
And oxen from the city, and goodly sheep
In haste they drove, and honey-hearted wine
And bread from out their houses brought, and heaped
Their firewood, and the winds from off the plain
Rolled the rich vapor far into the heaven.
And there all night upon the bridge of war
Sat glorying; many a fire before them blazed;
As when in heaven the stars about the moon
Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,
And every height comes out, and jutting peak
And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
Break open to their highest, and all the stars
Shine, and the shepherd gladdens in his heart:
So many a fire between the ships and stream
Of Xanthus blazed before the towers of Troy.
A thousand on the plain; and close by each
Sat fifty in the blaze of burning fire;
And champing golden grain the horses stood
Hard by their chariots waiting for the dawn."

These few samples of the similes scattered thick throughout the Iliad show that Homer laid

all the appearances of Nature under contribution, and the wildest and grandest not less than those that are homelike.

True it is that Homer in the Iliad nowhere stops to paint scenery for its own sake. He does this less than Virgil or most later epic poets. He is so full of business and of human action that he cannot stay for description. But in such passages as the Catalogue of the Grecian Host in the second book, there are brief but fine touches of geographical landscape, as he tells of the many lands whence they came; or again in his fixed but most suggestive epithets of places, as "the windy Ilion," "many-fountained Ida," and the deep-whirlpooled Scamander; Lacedæmon in the hollow of the hills; Messe, haunt of wild doves; vine-clad Epidaurus; windy Enerpe; Orchomenus rich in flocks.

I would that I could linger over this subject and quote some more passages, such as that where Achilles, long absent, returns to the conflict, and the immortal gods come down to range themselves, some with the Greeks, some on the side of Troy; and heaven and earth, the mountains and the rivers and the sea and the nether world beneath, all are moved to take part in the great issue.

But I must pass on to the scenery of the Odyssey. No doubt this poem contains much more description of landscape than the Iliad, and in that description, as Mr. Ruskin says, there seems

to be a preference for the tame and domestic rather than for the wild in Nature. But is there not enough in the subject and circumstance of the two poems to account for such difference? Ulysses, the much-traveled, much-suffering man, who had endured so many things by land and sea, his home-sick heart is yearning for his native Ithaca. That his heart should be weary of the sea and the mountains and all wild untractable things is only too natural. It is quite in keeping with and as a set-off against this feeling of home-weariness that the poet, in describing such a wanderer, should dwell with peculiar emphasis on all that is warm and comfortable and home-like in scenery.

Let me give one or two samples from Worsley's translation of the Odyssey, which I am disposed to think is the best poetic translation of any classical poet that we have in English. Mr. Worsley rendered the hexameters of Homer into the Spenserian stanza, and he so perfectly caught the whole rhythm and cadence of Spenser, and this answers so well to the spirit of the Odyssey, the most romantic of Greek poems, that I know no more delightful reading than those picturesque and melodious stanzas.

Here is one sample. Ulysses, having left Calypso's island on a raft, is shipwrecked in mid-seas, and this is the description of his coming to land on the island of Phæacia: —

> "Two nights and days in the tumultuous swell
> He wandered. Often did his heart forebode

Utter extinction in the yawning hell,
But when the fair-haired Dawn arising glowed,
And in the eastern heaven the thin light showed,
Came a calm-deepening day, windless and clear.
Then when Odysseus on a tall wave rode,
And his keen eyes along the heaving mere
Stretched in extreme desire, he saw the land rise near.

"As when a father, on the point to die,
Who for long time in sore disease hath lain,
By the strong Fates tormented heavily,
Till the pulse faileth for exceeding pain,
Feels the life stirring in his bones again;
While glad at heart his children smile around,
He also smiles — the gods have loosed his chain;
So welcome seemed the land with forest crowned,
And he rejoicing swam, and yearned to feel the ground.

"But now within a voice-throw of the rocks
The sound of waters did his ears appall.
Full on the coast the great waves' thunder-shocks
Roll, and afar the wet foam-vapors fall.
No roadstead there, no haven seemed at all,
Nor shelter where a ship might rest at ease;
But from the main-earth darted a wild wall
Of headlands. Then Odysseus' heart and knees
Were loosened; and his soul thus spake in the deep seas."

Then follows a fine description of his struggle with the breakers, and how his flesh was torn and his skin peeled against the sharp rocks: —

"He from the echoing breakers swam right fain,
Skirting the coast; if chance his eyes explore
Or far or near some haven of the main,
Or mild declivity of shelving shore.
But when he came the river-mouth before,
And his gaze rested on the long white gleam,
By rocks unchafed and windless evermore,
Here to his thought best landing-place did seem,
And in his soul he prayed, feeling the calm sweet stream."

Then the landing and climbing up into the wood, and hiding himself under a mound of gathered leaves: —

> "Where o'er his weary head,
> Athene all night long pain-healing slumber shed."

But I recommend every one to read the last hundred lines of the fifth book of the Odyssey. It is one of the most natural and beautiful descriptions of sea-coast scenery, heightened in its interest by the presence of man in strife with the waters, that is to be found in any poet.

The whole of this passage is commented on by Mr. Ruskin at length, but I think his comments are one-sided and overdone. No doubt the shipwrecked man kisses the corn-growing land when at last he reaches it, and gladly covers himself with the dead leaves. But it is not, as Mr. Ruskin says, that the Greek mind shrank from wild things, and took pleasure only in things subservient to human use. It is because it was the action natural to a shipwrecked man just escaped from the hateful sea to hug the land he had so much toil to reach; and it was natural for a poet, when describing his hero tossed and drenched for days amid the hungry foam, to bring out in strong contrast all the warmth and comfort of the dry cheerful earth.[1]

One sample of Homer's home-painting must be given, where we see —

[1] Odyssey, B. vii. 112; Worsley, B. vii. 17th stanza.

"All things are in order stored —
A home of ancient peace;" —

"Outside the court-yard stretched a planted space
Of orchard, and a fence environed all the place.

"There, in full prime, the orchard-trees grew tall,
Sweet-fig, pomegranate, apple fruited fair,
Pear and the healthful olive. Each and all
Both summer droughts and chills of winter spare.
All the year round they flourish. Some the air
Of zephyr warms to life, some doth mature,
Apple grows old on apple, pear on pear,
Fig follows fig, vintage doth vintage lure;
Thus the rich revolution doth for age endure.

"With well-sunned floor for drying, there is seen
The vineyard. Here the grapes they cull, there tread.
Here falls the blossom from the clusters green,
There the first blushings by the suns are shed.
Last, flowers forever fadeless, bed by bed;
Two streams: one waters the whole garden fair;
One through the court-yard, near the house is led,
Whereto with pitcher all the folk repair.
All these the God-sent gifts to King Alcinous were."

I might go on to quote the description of Calypso's cave, and many another landscape with which this Greek romance abounds. Indeed, it would take a summer day to exhaust the passages descriptive of Nature in the Odyssey and the Iliad alone, before we could arrive at an adequate idea of the Homeric view of Nature. This only I will say and pass on — that in the Odyssey you do find that the scenes most lovingly depicted are home scenes of order, comfort, and repose. But this is not because, as Mr. Ruskin says, the Greek

mind abhorred the wildness of nature, but because, with such a character to describe as Ulysses, battered by the strokes of doom, travel-weary and home-sick, the natural framework to such a human figure, that which gives at once contrast and relief, is a setting taken from the reposeful side of Nature. Of storm and trouble you have had enough in the human character. Nature here must furnish the background of repose. But in the Iliad, if we look at the similes, we find them taken from every form and aspect of Nature — the wild and vast as well as the homely and the minute. The poet gathers images from every element, earth, sky, and sea, mountain and meadow; but all are used, not for their own sakes, not to dwell on themselves alone, but to bring out by similitude the force of the human passions and actions, which are the substance of the epic. But the poet who could so use Nature, making her a storehouse of images whence he drew at will, must have lived familiarly in the eye of Nature, loving her in all her aspects with a true though unconscious love.

CHAPTER X.

NATURE IN LUCRETIUS AND VIRGIL.

When from the representations of Nature in Homer, and indeed in all the Greek poets, we turn to the rural descriptions of the Roman poets, we feel that we have passed into a wholly different atmosphere. If there were no other there is at least this cardinal distinction between them: — The Greeks had no antiquity behind them, at least no earlier literature to come between them and the open face of things. They saw at first hand with their own eyes, felt with their own hearts, described in their own words. The Romans, those at least of the literary age, before they wrote a line that has come down to us, had received the whole Hellenic learning and poetry poured in upon them, so that the very air of Italy was colored with the hues of Greece. This makes it so difficult, in studying the productions of any Roman poet — their descriptions of Nature not less than other things — to be sure that you have the features of Italian scenery pure and uncolored, and that they have not been tinged and refracted by the Hellenic medium of associations and language through which they were

habitually beheld. No doubt the Romans originally were and never ceased to be a country-loving people. The pictures that have come down to us of Cincinnatus, and of other worthies of the early Republic, represent even their greatest generals and dictators as living on paternal farms in rural thrift and simplicity. But there remains no poetry coeval with that primitive time. Before we reach their poets the day of small estates and patrician life in the fields is over, all Italy is held in vast domains by rich senators who themselves lived in the city, and committed the care of their lands to a bailiff with hordes of slaves.

In the last half-century of the Republic, to which belong the earliest Roman poets who describe Nature, the town life, varied by retirement to the Tiburtine or Sabine villa, was universal among the poets and their associates. Some of them had passed their childhood in the rustic life of distant provinces, and the remembrance of that life still lives in their poetry, as in Catullus, and more distinctively in Virgil. The earliest pictures of Nature that occur in any Roman poetry are to be found not in pastoral or idyl, but in the great philosophic poem that expounds an elaborate system of Nature. Lucretius was too earnest a preacher of his Atomic Philosophy to linger over descriptions of scenery for their own sake. Nevertheless, his wearisome expositions of materialistic system are relieved by many a beautiful illustration drawn directly from the Nature

which his own eyes had seen, and portrayed with a clearness of outline and a startling vividness, in which, as Professor Sellar has truly said, he is unrivaled in antiquity save by Homer. The rigorous dogmatism of a mechanical philosophy is in him combined with the keenest eye to all the appearances of the outer world, minute as well as vast. Evidently he had lived much in the open air, had been a haunter of all waste places, wild mountain ranges, dripping caves, solitary sea-shores. He had noted all the sights, listened to the sounds and the silences, and observed the ways of the wild creatures that dwell there. His impressions he has stamped in many a noble line, that comes in with delightful freshness to illustrate his prolix argument. His eye was upon the smallest and most sequestered appearances, as the many-colored shells on the shore, and the dripping of water over moss-covered rocks; but still more familiarly did his imagination move with the great elemental movements of Nature, and when the storms and winds were up, he found himself "one among the many there." According to the philosophy he had adopted, and earnestly propounded, all the most beautiful and mysterious aspects of things were the mere products of dead mechanic forces. But the genius of the poet at times shook itself free from the trammels of his creed, and rose to the contemplation, not of a dead mechanic world, but of one informed by a vast life, which moves

through all material things, and makes them instinct with unity.

In the language of the philosophers, while consciously he taught only a *Natura naturata*, his imagination and sympathy grasped, in spite of him, a *Natura naturans*. It is impossible that any great poet, however his understanding may be caught in the meshes of mere materialism, can in his hours of inspiration rest contented with that. Assuredly Lucretius did not. Accordingly, we find him here and there breaking out into the earliest utterance of that mystical Pantheistic feeling about the life of Nature, which we shall find reappearing in Virgil, and which has recurred so powerfully in modern poetry.

Catullus, the poet contemporary with Lucretius, is too much absorbed in love and friendship, finds too exciting an interest in the society of man, to give much time to Nature. In his most original poems, or at least those in which he most speaks out his feelings, Nature holds little, almost no place. Two poems refer to his villa at Tibur, with, however, little mention of any rural pleasures connected with it.

The well-known lines on his return to his home at Sirmio, on the Lago di Garda, for all their wonderful charm, breathe more of the love of home and rest after long voyaging than of enjoyment in Nature for her own sake. His more elaborate and artistic poems contain some beautiful natural images and similes, expressed with

that unstudied felicity and clear sense of beauty which distinguished him. But they do not come to more than side glances by the way, as he hurries on to his human theme. It has, however, been remarked, that while to Lucretius, to Horace, even to Virgil, the sea is a thing of dread rather than of admiration, from which they shrank as a treacherous creature, Catullus felt the grandeur of its immensity, and rejoiced in the laughter of the waves in calm, and in their changing colors beneath the storm.

Germans have written learned books, some to maintain, others to deny, that the ancient Greeks and Romans had any feeling for Nature, or, as the phrase goes, were inspired by the sentiment of Nature. Schiller has gone as far as to deny that Homer had any more caring for Nature than he had for the garment, the shield, the armor, which he describes with equal relish. In the face of such an assertion we have but to read a few passages from Homer above cited, and innumerable others like them. No doubt the ancients had not that intimate, delicate, dwelling sympathy for Nature which we call the modern feeling. But there is hardly a tone of sentiment which Nature in modern times has evoked, of which some faint prelude at least might not be found among them. Passages from the dialogue, and especially from the choruses, of Sophocles and Euripides, might, had we time, have been cited, which speak of natural objects with almost as much fondness as though they had been written yesterday.

One side of this feeling, which is dwelt on as peculiarly a birth of recent times, is the passion for mountains. And no doubt the feeling of the Latin poets as they thought of them was for the most part shuddering and affright. Yet Virgil, though he generally speaks the same language, seems at times to catch something of their free and far delight, as when he speaks of Father Apennine roaring with all his holm-oaks, and rejoicing to heave his snow-white summit into the sky. In such a passage it would seem as though the power of hills was for a moment on him, and he caught a prophetic glimpse of that mountain-rapture which was reserved for this century at last adequately to express. Quinctilian, however, represents the current feeling of his countrymen when he says, "Species maritimis, planis, amœnis," — Beauty belongs to countries that lie beside the sea, level and pleasant.

But granting that the feeling for Nature among the Romans was thus limited, if one wished to prove that it was real, one would be content to point to Virgil alone. His preëminence as a poet of the country was early recognized by his friend and contemporary, Horace: —

> "Molle atque facetum
> Virgilio annuerunt gaudentes rure Camœnæ," —

To Virgil the Muses of the country gave the gift of delicacy and artistic skill. When Horace thus wrote of his friend only the Eclogues had as yet appeared. But the two greater poems which

Virgil afterwards produced, among their other merits, elevate him, as a lover and describer of natural scenes, to a place which his earlier poems alone would not have won for him.

With regard to the Eclogues, the purely imitative and conventional character of their language, personages, and sentiment, is well known. But for long it was believed that their scenery at least was real, borrowed from Mantua and the banks of his native Mincio. But later critics have shown that imitation penetrated even here, and that as the sentiments and substance of the Eclogues are all borrowed from Theocritus, not less is the framework of scenery in which these are set. The vine-clad cave in which the shepherd reclines, the briery crag from which he sees his goats hanging, the mountains that cast long shadows toward evening, these, it is said, are nowhere to be seen in the neighborhood of Mantua, but belong entirely to Sicily. Some even assert that neither the ilex, the chestnut, nor the beech grows anywhere near the banks of the Mincio. Yet even amid the prevailingly Sicilian scenery there are touches here and there, where he reverts to what his own eyes had seen, as where he describes his farm as covered with bare stones and slimy bulrushes, and the Mincio as weaving for his green banks a fringe of tender reeds.

Even though the imagery of the Eclogues may be borrowed from the Sicilian poet, yet here, as everywhere, Virgil is no mere translator, but

proves by the tender grace of the language in which he clothes the borrowed imagery his feeling for original Nature. In the fifth Eclogue, when two shepherds have been playing each his finest strain, partly to please, partly to emulate the other, at the close, Menalcas says to Mopsus : —

"Such is thy song to me, O singer divine!
As is sleep upon the grass to weary men, as in summer heat,
Thirst to slake with pleasant water from the leaping brook."

And then when Menalcas has sung his strain this is the reply of Mopsus : —

"What gifts, what shall I render thee for such a song?
For not so delightful to my ear is the sighing of the coming south wind,
Nor the beating of billows upon the shore,
Nor the sound of streams down-falling through the rocky glens."

Of these and suchlike images the first hints may have been from Theocritus, but assuredly they have won a new charm in their passage through the mind of Virgil.

But if the scenery of the Eclogues partakes in some measure of the conventional mould in which the whole of the poems are cast, the *Georgics* are poetry in earnest, dealing with a real subject, and describing, in many places at least, real landscapes. Doubtless here, too, as everywhere, Virgil is the learned poet; his mind comes to his subject laden with the spoils of all antiquity. As he describes natural objects, all the associations which ancient Mythology and

Greek poetry had thrown around them rise spontaneously before him. Thus he would often seem to look at things not at first-hand with his own eyes, but through the media which former poets had fashioned for him. But this, if we think of it, is one element of the consummate art of the Georgics. The poet had to raise a homely subject above the dust of commonplace, to add dignity to objects and processes which in themselves might seem undignified, or even vulgar. Therefore he takes the husbandman back to earlier times, and invests his toils with all the veneration and sanctity which primeval tradition has shed around them, and teaches him to feel that in his pursuits he is one with the first forefathers of the race. This archaic coloring, richly yet delicately suffused, invests the poem with a peculiar charm. Just so a modern poet, wishing to throw around the life of shepherd and husbandman, even in our own days, an air of ancient reverence, might still revert to Bible stories of the patriarchs — to Jacob and Rachel meeting by the well, to Ruth in the corn-field, and David among the sheep-cotes of Bethlehem. But making full allowance for all that is archaic and mythological in the allusions to distant ages and Eastern lands, there remains a large background of landscape in which the plains of Mantua and Campania lie spread before us, and the intense skies of Italy bend overhead.

Such a passage as the following is surely the

work of one who had watched and loved the alternations of the Italian summer: —

"But when glad summer at the west winds' call
Shall send the flocks to woods and pastures free,
Then 'neath the star of dawn on the cool fields
Let browse thy sheep and goats, while morn is young,
And the fresh dew lies hoary on the grass —
The dew on tender blade, to cattle dear.
When the fourth hour of day brings parching thirst,
And in the trees cicadas' notes are loud,
Then bid the herd at wells and deep clear pools
Drink the stream running from full oaken troughs.
But in the deep noon heat a shady vale
Seek, if perchance some oak of antique bulk
There spread his giant boughs; or some grove dark
With many a holm-oak's gloom reposeth nigh
In hallowed shadow. Then at set of sun
Once more supply clear streams and drive afield
Thy flock, when eventide cools all the air,
And the moon dewy-moist repairs the lawns
With freshness, while the shores with halcyon notes
Resound, the copses with the goldfinch song."

It has generally been held that one of the most prominent notes of Virgil's genius was his sympathy with Nature. To this the late Professor Conington, whose opinion on whatever concerned Virgil deserves all respect, used to demur, and to maintain rather that his chief characteristic lay in an elaborate and refined culture, manifesting itself in the most consummate delicacy and grace. But though Virgil was before all things the poet of learned culture and artistic beauty, this did not hinder, rather prompted him, to turn on Nature a sympathetic and loving eye. The perception of a sympathy between the feel-

ings and vicissitudes of man and the world that surrounds him appears nowhere so strongly as in his latest poem, the Æneid. It may have been that as his subject led him much into battles and adventures, alien to his taste, he seized all the more eagerly every opportunity of reverting to that Nature which had been his earliest delight.

Whatever be the cause, the pictures of Nature, whether in description or in simile, are more frequent, more intimate, more tender, than in either of his earlier productions. It has been noticed, for instance, that at the beginning of the sixth book, as the Sibyl draws nigh, the earth rumbles, the mountains quake, as if sharing the human dread at her approach; and that throughout the fourth book there is maintained a fine sympathy between the aspects of the outer world and the passions which agitate the human actors.

It is thus he sets off the tumult in the soul of the lovelorn and wronged queen in contrast with the calm and silence of night: —

"Now night it was, and everything on earth had won the grace
Of quiet sleep; the woods had rest, the wildered waters' face:
It was the tide when stars roll on amid their courses due,
And all the tilth is hushed, and beasts, and birds of many a hue,
And all that is in waters wide, and what the waste doth keep
In thicket rough, amid the hush of night tide lay asleep,
And slipping off the load of care forgat their toilsome part.
But ne'er might that Phœnician queen, that most unhappy heart,
Sink into sleep, or take the night into her eyes and breast,
Her sorrows grow, and love again swells up with all unrest."

Is not the feeling here what would be called quite modern? For its tone, might it not have been written yesterday? This contrast between Nature's repose and the tumult of the human heart, thus consciously felt and expressed, belong to a late and self-conscious age. In Homer you may see such contrasts, as when Helen, looking from the walls of Troy, misses her true brothers from among the Achaian host, and says that they kept aloof from the war, fearing the reproach which she had brought on herself and them. And the poet adds: —

> "So spake she, but them already the life-giving earth covered
> In Lacedæmon there, in their dear native land."

Here the contrast is only half consciously felt, hinted at obliquely, not brought into prominence. To emphasize and dwell on the contrast, as Virgil does, is modern, one of the many points in which the Latin poet's feeling is like that of our own day.

Many more passages might be cited where Virgil turns aside from his epic narrative to dwell over natural scenes. The elaborate description of the storm in the first book; the sail through the Ionian Islands; the night passed on the Sicilian coast with Ætna heard thundering overhead through the dark, in the third book; the island, in the fifth book, which is made the goal round which the racing-boats row; the fleet entering the mouth of the Tiber while the calm morning lies ruddy on the sea; — these are a few which come to mind.

But it is in the many similes scattered throughout the Æneid that the Virgilian grace and tenderness is seen at its best. It has been the fashion with the commentators to trace back every one of Virgil's similes to Homer or some other Greek poet. And the two I shall now give have not wholly escaped this imputation, though there seems small foundation for it in their case.

In the boat-race, when Mnestheus, having run his boat into a narrow and sheltered passage among rocks, has with difficulty scraped through and shot again into open sea, this is Virgil's comparison : —

"As a dove scared suddenly from a cave,
Where she has her home and dear nestlings in the crannied rock,
Hurries fieldward in her flight, and with flurried pinions
Loudly flaps the roof — soon gliding in calm air
Skims her smooth way, sailing aloof on moveless wings."

Again, when Æneas, led by the Sibyl, descends to the nether world, and arrives at the shores of the river Styx, the ghosts of the dead come flocking round him in crowds : —

"Numerous as the leaves in the woods that at first touch of autumn's cold
Gliding fall ; or numerous as the birds that flock together shoreward from the deep,
When wintry weather drives them across the sea, and sends them into sunny lands."

The full beauty, however, of passages like these cannot be felt when they are detached from the whole scene in which they are inlaid. Æneas

traveling far into the nether gloom, through Pluto's empty halls and ghastly realms of the dead, is a picture almost too dismal. But how exquisitely does Virgil relieve his own heart and that of the reader, by letting in on that sad world these glimpses of a land still gladdened by the sun!

If you compare Virgil with Homer, where they describe the same natural objects, or even where the Latin poet borrows his similes directly from the Greek, you cannot but feel how wide is the difference between them. There is no more the entire outwardness, the self-forgetting serenity of Homer's descriptions, the colorless transparency as of a mountain range, whose every stone and blade of grass lies reflected in the clear depths of an unmoving lake. Received into Virgil's heart the outward world becomes colored with some of the melancholy of the poet and his time. Not that to Virgil's eye there was any sadness in Nature herself, but in his hands Nature becomes so humanized, it so lends itself to human joys and sorrows, that these cast their own gleams, and still more their shadows, on that, in itself, unimpassioned countenance. This sympathy between man and Nature Virgil apprehended more feelingly than any other Roman poet; and in this, as in so many other things, we find in him an anticipation of the modern time. As compared with Lucretius, Virgil deals with Nature in a less sublime, but more human way. Lucretius de-

mands the explanation of Nature and her processes, Virgil seeks to enter into her feeling, to catch her sentiment. As a French author has expressed it: "Lucretius is not so much arrested by the beauty of Nature, as roused by its mystery, to extort the secret of it. I admire thee, he seems to say, but on condition that I may investigate and understand thee." In Lucretius man and Nature stand over against each other, observer and observed: they do not meet and interpenetrate each other. Between Virgil and the outward world there is no such philosophic barrier; his feelings flow freely forth to it, and there find more or less satisfaction, — satisfaction as from a familiar companion; whether familiar by the associations of childhood or through the cherished learning of later years.

Lucretius had, as we know, a philosophic faith about Nature, which satisfied his understanding, if it did not satisfy what was deeper in him than understanding — that high imagination and poetic instinct which at times craved a more spiritual interpretation. Virgil, on the other hand, had no consistent theory regarding that Nature which he apprehended so feelingly. In general he acquiesced in the orthodox mythology which he had received from the tradition of the poets. And yet, while he accepted it for poetic, or even patriotic reasons, he must, when he thought of it, have felt strange misgivings. For the mythologic faith had entirely ceased to be real to himself or to his

educated countrymen. That he longed at times to penetrate the secret of Nature, and to know the causes of things, he himself assures us. But there is no evidence in his poetry that he ever rose to as clear a conception of one all-ruling Divine Power as even Cicero had probably reached. There are, however, two well-known passages, one in the fourth Georgic, the other in the sixth Æneid, in which Virgil expresses a mystic and pantheistic theory as to an all-pervading life of the world, which, if it cannot be called his philosophic belief, seems to have been to him at least more than a mere poetic fancy. Lucretius, impelled by the craving of his imagination for life, not death, had in the opening of his poem and elsewhere allowed such a feeling, as it were, to escape him, but had never recognized it as an article of his faith. In Virgil it approaches more nearly to a consciously held belief, or at least to a possible solution of the mystery of Nature. It has been reserved for modern times to give fuller expression to the same tendency of thought, sometimes as a mere feeling, sometimes as a conviction. But however such a view may have expressed passing phases, either of thought or feeling, it has never, either now or in ancient times, approached to be a solution which can satisfy at once reason, heart, and conscience.

Since these remarks on Virgil were in the press, Professor Sellar's work on Virgil has appeared. If I could have read it before writing

the above pages, I should probably have said more of Virgil's treatment of Nature, or less. As it is, I have allowed what I had said to remain unchanged. Those who wish to see this and every other aspect of Virgil's poetry treated in the most thorough and instructive way, will be amply rewarded by the study of Professor Sellar's book.

CHAPTER XI.

NATURE IN CHAUCER, SHAKESPEARE, AND MILTON.

To pass from the Virgilian view of Nature to that of our earliest English poet, though it brings us nearer our own age in time, is really to recede from it in feeling to a remote and primitive antiquity. No poet ever loved Nature more than Chaucer did; but it was with a simple, unreflective, child-like love. The Morning Star of English Song, as he has been called, man of the world and skilled in affairs, at home in courts and with the great, conversant with the ways of all men, high and low, could turn aside from the gorgeous imagery that filled his poetic vision, from the profusion of mediæval ceremonies and cavalcade, of high processions with soldiers in armor, caparisoned horses and bedizened ladies, from gallant knights with lordly manners, and homely country-people, from sights and stories fetched from many lands, — to dwell tenderly on the plain sights and sounds of external nature, and to sing of them with the transparency and sweetness of a child. It was Nature in her "first intention," her most obvious aspects, that at-

tracted him. Once, indeed, in the "Assembly of Foules," he speaks of "that noble Goddesse of Nature." This, however, is not his usual language, but rather a conventional way of speaking caught from the Latin poets he had read. Again, in a more serious strain, the same poem speaks thus: —

> "Nature, the vicare of the Almightie Lord;"

but it is not on Nature as a great whole, much less as an abstraction, that his thought usually dwells. It is the outer world in its most concrete forms and objects, with which he delights to interweave his poetry — the homely scenes of South England, the oaks and other forest trees, the green meadows, quiet fields, and comfortable farms, as well as the great castles where the nobles dwelt. One associates him with the green lanes and downs of Surrey and Kent, their natural copsewoods and undulating greenery. I know not that the habitual forms of English landscape, those which are most rural and most unchanged, have ever since found a truer poet, one who so brings before the mind the scene and the spirit of it uncolored by any intervention of his own thought or sentiment. And his favorite season — it is the May-time. Of this he is never tired of singing. When there comes a really spring-like day in May, the east wind gone, and the west wind blowing softly, the leaves coming out, and the birds singing, at such a season one feels instinctively this is the Chaucer atmosphere and

time. One passage has been cited in a former chapter in which Chaucer speaks of the daisy very lovingly. Other passages might be cited in which he turns again and again to the same flower, proving that it was a favorite with one poet before either Burns or Wordsworth.

Let me give one more passage which gives the characteristic landscape of Chaucer and his feeling about it: —

"When shourés sote of rain descended soft,
Causing the ground felé times and oft
Up for to give many a wholesome air,
And every plainé was y-clothed fair

"With newé green, and maketh smallé flow'rs
To springen here and there in field and mead
So very good and wholesome be the show'rs,
That they renewen that was old and dead
In winter time, and out of every seed
Springeth the herbé, so that every wight
Of this seasón waxeth right glad and light.

. . . . . .

"Up I rose three hourés after twelfe
About the springing of the gladsome day,
And on I put my gear and mine array,
And to a pleasant grove I 'gan to pass
Long ere the brighté sun uprisen was;

"In which were oakés great, straight as a line,
Under the which the grass so fresh of hue
Was newly sprung; and an eight foot or nine
Every tree well from his fellow grew,
With branches broad laden with leavés new,
That sprungen out against the sunné sheen,
Some very red, and some a glad light green,

"Which (as me thought) was a right pleasant sight;
And eke the birdés songés for to hear

Would have rejoicéd any earthly wight;
And I, that could not yet in no mannere
Hearen the nightingale of all the year,
Full busily heark'ned with heart and ear.
If I her voice perceive could anywhere."

This is exactly the Chaucer landscape. The forest trees are described each after their kind; even the varieties of color of oak leaves in spring-time he notes, some coming out "very red," some of a golden green hue — a fact not noticed, as far as I remember, by any other poet; the soft green grass, as soft as velvet under foot, he is never done praising; the note of each song-bird he knows and delights in. These, with here and there a quaint old garden described, such is the scenery in which his human portraits are inlaid. He is altogether one of the most amply descriptive of English poets till we arrive at quite recent times. And it is one sign of the permanence and stability of England, even amidst all change, that among the copsewoods of Kent and the lanes of Surrey just such scenes may be seen any spring-day now as Chaucer loved to describe nearly five hundred years ago. This unchanged landscape is everywhere in his poetry blended with the mediæval manners and costumes that have long since passed, as a modern poet, in phrase like Chaucer's own, has well sung: —

"He listeneth to the lark,
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
Of painted glass, in leaden lattice bound,
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
Then writeth in a book like any clerk."

SHAKESPEARE.

The drama is the last form of poetry to which we would turn in hope of finding rural objects and scenery described. Yet it is astonishing how much of this kind can be culled from a careful search through Shakespeare's plays. Indeed it has been remarked how much of out-of-doors life there is in Shakespeare's dramas, how much of the action is carried on under the open sky. No doubt the pressure of human action and emotion is too absorbing to admit of detailed description — in most cases of more than passing allusions. Yet engrossed though he is with stirring events and thrilling emotions and powerful human characters, it is wonderful how many are the side-glances that he and his characters cast at the Nature that surrounds them. And these glances are like everything else in him, rapid, vivid, and intense. As has been said, natural scenes "he so paints by occurrences, by allusions, by the emotions of his characters, that we seem to see them before our eyes, and to live in them." There is hardly one of his plays in which the season and the scene is not flashed upon the mind by a single stroke more vividly than it could be by the most lengthened description: —

> "Lady! by yonder silver moon I swear,
> That tips with silver all the fruit-tree tops."

How these few words shed round us all the loveliness of the Italian night! Or that other

To take one sample out of many. In "Macbeth," for instance, how does the scenery at every turn answer to the action and the emotion! For the first appearance of the witches there is the blasted heath, the thunder and lightning; then, as the key-note to Lady Macbeth's fell purpose, there is —

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements."

But when King Duncan himself, with his retinue, appears, the whole aspect of things is changed, and the gracious disposition of the old king comes out very naturally in the view he takes of the castle in which he was so soon to meet his doom: —

> "This castle has a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses."

Banquo replies: —

> "This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle;
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
> The air is delicate."

The castle, with its buttresses and battlements, its high gables and overhanging towers, lends itself as readily to the pleasant humor of the kindly king that calm afternoon, as it will do to the horror and the gloom of the morrow. Then

the night in which the murder was done is quite such a night as often comes in dead winter, yet fits in so well with the deed and the feeling it awakened in men's hearts.

"*Lennox.* The night has been unruly: where we lay
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death:
And other prodigies.
Macb. 'T was a rough night.
Len. My young remembrance cannot parallel
A fellow to it."

This is the talk that passes just before the murder is known. And after it is known, this is the kind of day that follows:

"By the clock, 't is day,
And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp."

Again, as twilight brings on the night which is to see Banquo taken out of the way, Macbeth exclaims —

"Come, seeling night,
Skarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
Which keeps me pale! — Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse."

But why go on quoting passages, which all remember, to show how exactly all through this or the other dramas the face of Nature answers to the deeds and the emotions of the human agents, and how a line — sometimes a word in the midst of a rapid dialogue — lets in the open air, and all

the surrounding nature, more tellingly than pages of description could have done. But between Shakespeare and a modern poet there is this great difference, that, while in the latter this correspondence is attained by careful study and elaborate forethought, in Shakespeare we may well believe that the white heat of imagination which created and moulded the characters in all their throng of emotion struck off, at the same moment, almost unconsciously, the aspects of external nature which were proper to them.

The forest was evidently with Shakespeare a favorite resort, bringing back to him, as it would, recollections of his youthful deer-huntings. In his day the forest was not far off or strange, but still a familiar place, as we are told, coming up very close to the gates of the country town. From Stratford-on-Avon he had not far to go before he found himself in the midst of the forest of fine oaks, the survivors of which are still seen all about in the parks and lanes of Warwickshire. So when he would spend the summer night in the most extravagant mirth and drollery, it is out to the wild wood that he leads his company; when he would surround the grave thoughts of the exiled Duke and the melancholy of Jaques with a congenial background, he places them in the Forest of Arden, where free Nature fits into the mood, and brings soothing to their mental maladies.

> "Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?"

In how many ways throughout these plays are the aspects of human life set forth by their resemblances in Nature!

"*Jul.* The current that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage;
But, when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with the enameled stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
And so by many winding nooks he strays
With willing sport, to the wild ocean.
Then let me go, and hinder not my course,
I 'll be as patient as a gentle stream,
And make my pastime of each weary step,
Till the last step have brought me to my love;
And then I 'll rest, as, after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium."

Shakespeare, whether from watching the sea from the shore, or from sailing on it, was evidently at home in describing it.

The sea storm in "Pericles" (Act iii. Scene 1) is full of life and movement, made all the more terrible by the death of the queen on shipboard when the tempest is at its height. They are off the coast of Tharsus, and the ship is driving in upon it unmanageably, and will not answer to the helm: —

"1*st Sailor.* — Slack the bolins there; thou wilt not, wilt thou? Blow and split thyself.

2*d Sailor.* — But sea room, an the brine and cloudy billow kiss the moon, I care not.

1*st Sailor.* — Sir, your queen must overboard; the sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be cleared of the dead."

The human situation and the conflict of the elements combine each to heighten to the utmost the terror and despair of the other. The conjunction is no doubt finely imagined. But when a modern poet writes: "No poetry of shipwreck and the sea has ever equaled the great scene of "Pericles," no such note of music was ever struck out of the clash and contention of tempestuous elements, one cannot but feel that he indulges in exaggeration.

For coast scenery the description of Dover cliffs stands almost alone.

But while with the forest and the sea-coast Shakespeare's early life had made him familiar, he had not, as far as we know, had much, if any, experience of mountains. Of Nature, as of man, he painted for the most part what he had seen and known — idealizing it of course, but having caught the first hint from reality. And mountains formed no part of the Warwickshire or indeed of the England which he knew. Therefore while we find many notices of the fields, the forest, and the sea, and of the way they affect human imaginations, there is no allusion to the effect of mountain scenery. It could not have been said of him: —

"The power of hills is on thee."

On this fact Mr Ruskin has this characteristic reflection, that Shakespeare having been ordained to take a full view of total human nature, to be perfectly equal and universal in his portraiture

of man, could be allowed no mountains, nor even supreme natural beauty. For had he been reared among mountains they would have overbalanced him, have laid too powerful a grasp on his imagination, have made him lean too much their way, and so would have marred his universality. Whether we take this view of it or not, it is certain that the power of the mountains is not expressed in that poetry which expresses almost every other conceivable thing, and that the mountain rapture had to lie dumb for two more centuries before it found utterance in English song.

In "Cymbeline" the two noble youths are brought up in caves among the mountains, but from this their characters receive no touch of freedom or grandeur, but are enhanced only by having taken no taint of degradation from so base a dwelling-place. "The only thing belonging to the hills," says Mr. Ruskin, "that Shakespeare seems to feel as noble, was the pine-tree, and that was because he had seen in Warwickshire clumps of pine occasionally rising on little sandstone mounds above the lowland woods." He touches on this tree fondly again and again.

> "As rough
> Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind,
> That by his top doth take the mountain pine,
> And make him stoop to the vale."

Again: —

> "You may as well forbid the mountain pines
> To wave their high tops, and to make no noise
> When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven."

And again: —

> "But when from under this terrestrial bank
> He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines."

He knew little then of the mountains by experience; but had he known them more, though they might have added some sternness to his genius, some awe to his thoughts about life, they might perhaps have narrowed his range and made his view of men less universal and serene. So Mr. Ruskin thinks. And yet perhaps it is hardly safe so to speculate about Shakespeare. For could not the mind which took in and harmonized so many things, have made room for this other influence, without deranging its proportions and marring its universality?

Though Shakespeare sometimes describes, in a general way, countries he had never seen, as in that exquisite description of Sicily in the "Winter's Tale," —

> "The climate's delicate, the air most sweet,
> Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing
> The common praise it bears" —

yet whenever he descends to details of country life and scenery, as he so often does, every word bears the stamp of having been brought, not from books, but from what his own eyes had seen in the neighborhood of Stratford-upon-Avon. How familiar he was with the garden and all its processes is seen by many a metaphor and allusion, perhaps nowhere more notably than in the 4th Scene of the 3d Act of "Richard II.," where

in the Duke of York's garden at Langley the discourse of the gardener and his men on the management of fruit-trees is turned to political meaning. A disordered state is a neglected and unweeded garden, the pruning and bleeding of fruit-trees are the restraining great and growing men in the state, and all the operations are so described and applied as only an adept in gardening could do; or again, there is the well-known metaphor in Wolsey's speech where he likens his blushing honors to blossoms nipt by frost. The process of grafting furnishes many a metaphor for human doings. All the ordinary forest trees, the oak, the elm, the pine, the willow, come in with the easy handling of one who knew them from boyhood. Every bird, the rook, the chough, the throstle, the ousel-cock or blackbird, the nightingale,

> "The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
> The plain-song cuckoo gray" —

all find familiar notice; and perhaps of these we might select the lark as his favorite, to judge by the frequency of allusion to it.

Though garden flowers — such garden flowers as were cultivated in his time — are not passed over, yet much more noteworthy is the loving way in which Shakespeare dwells, or rather makes his characters dwell, on the field-flowers. Almost every wild-flower that is to be found at this day in the meadows and woods by Avon side looks out from some part or other of his poetry.

But this love for flowers, it has been noted, he puts in the mouth, not of his strong heroic characters, his Henry V. or Othello, but in the lips of his more feminine ones. It is the sentimental Duke in "Twelfth Night" who exclaims —

> "That strain again; it had a dying fall:
> Oh! it came o'er my ear like the sweet south,
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing, and giving odor" —

just such a bank as may be seen any April day under the Warwickshire hedge-rows. Every one remembers poor Ophelia and her flowers, the flowers with which Arviragus promises to sweeten the sad grave of Fidele; and, above all, the wonderful scene in the "Winter's Tale" where Perdita presiding at the sheep-shearing feast sorts the flowers according to the age of the guests, "flowers of winter, rosemary and rue," to the elders, to men of middle age flowers of middle summer —

> "Hot lavender, mints, savory, majoram,
> The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
> And with him rises weeping."

And for her fairest friend —

> "I would I had some flowers o' the spring that might
> Become your time of day;
> Daffodils, violets, and pale primroses."

Lastly, the song which winds up "Love's Labor Lost," — with what lyric sweetness it condenses how much of flowery spring and of nipping winter into a few easy lines! In this as in all other mentions of wild-flowers in Shakespeare, it has

been remarked how true he is to time and season, giving to each flower its proper season and haunt, and sorting them all with the careless ease of one to whom they were among the most familiar things. In this he contrasts with the artistic but not accurate assortment of flowers in the well-known passage of "Lycidas," where Milton groups in one posy flowers belonging to different seasons.

On the whole, though Shakespeare never set himself formally to study or describe external Nature, yet his dramas are full of her presence and her works — not taken from books or daintily tricked out by art, but idealized from his memory well stored with country scenes. Again, these are given, not in elaborate descriptions, but in rapid strokes, and side-glances, vivid, penetrating, intense, thrown off from the heat of an imagination brooding mainly over human interests and emotions. And perhaps after all that view of Nature is the truest, healthiest, manliest, which does not pore or moralize over her appearances, but keeps them in the background, putting man into the foreground and making him the central object. As Man and Nature stand over against each other, and are evidently made each for each, it may be that not apart from Man, with his emotions and his destiny, can Nature be rightly conceived and portrayed.

MILTON.

When we pass from the images of Nature that abound in Chaucer and in Shakespeare to those which Milton furnishes, the transition is much the same as when we pass from the scenery of Homer to that of Virgil. The contrast is that between natural free-flowing poetry, in which the beauty is child-like and unconscious, and highly cultured artistic poetry, which produces its effects through a medium of learned illustration, ornate coloring, and stately diction. In the one case Nature is seen directly and at first hand, with nothing between the poet and the object except the imaginative emotion under which he works. In the other, Nature is apprehended only in her "second intention," as logicians speak, only as she appears through a beautiful haze, compounded of learning, associations of the past, and carefully selected artistic colors. With Milton, Nature was not his first love, but held only a secondary place in his affections. He was in the first place a scholar, a man of letters, with the theologian and polemic latent in him. A lover of all artistic beauty he was, no doubt, and of Nature mainly as it lends itself to this perception. And as is his mode of apprehending Nature, such is the language in which he describes her. When he reached his full maturity he had framed for himself out of the richness of his genius and the resources of his learning a style elaborate and splen-

did, so that he stands unique among English poets, "our one first-rate master in the grand style." As an eminent living French writer says, — "For rendering things he has the unique word, the word which is a discovery," and "he has not only the image and the word, he has the period also, the large musical phrase, somewhat laden with ornaments and intricate with inversions, but bearing all along with it in its superb undulation. Above all, he has something indescribably serene and victorious, an unfailing level of style, power indomitable." This admirable description of M. Scherer applies mainly to Milton's style, as it was fully elaborated in his great epic. And the thought has sometimes occurred, whether this magnificently elaborated style can be a fit vehicle for rendering truly the simplicity, the refreshingness of Nature, — whether the poet's art, from its very opulence, must not color too much the clearness and transparency of the external world. However this may be, it is certain that it is not to his maturer poems, with their grandeur of style, that we look for his most vivid renderings of scenery, but to those early poems, which had more native grace of diction and less of artistic elaboration. Nowhere has Milton shown such an eye for scenery as in those first poems, "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Lycidas," and "Comus," composed before he was thirty, just after leaving Cambridge, while he was living under his father's roof at Horton, in

Buckinghamshire. During the five years of country life, the most genial of all his years, amid his incessant study of the Greek and Latin poets, and other self-improvement, his heart was perhaps more open than at any other time to the rural beauty which lay around him. "Comus" and "Lycidas" both contain fine natural imagery, yet somewhat deflected by the artistic framework in which it is set. In the latter poem, in which Milton, adapting the idyllic form of Virgil, fills it with a mightier power, classical allusion and mythology are strangely, yet not unharmoniously, blended with pictures taken from English landscape. Every one remembers the splendid grouping of flowers which he there broiders in. Of this catalogue it has been observed that, beautiful as it is, it violates the truth of nature, as it places side by side flowers of different seasons which are never seen flowering together. It is in his two "descriptive Lyrics" that we find the clearest proofs of an eye that had observed Nature at first hand and for itself. In the poem descriptive of mirth, it has been observed that the mirth is of a very sedate kind, not reaching beyond a "trim and stately cheerfulness." The mythological pedigrees attached both to mirth and to melancholy strike us now as somewhat strange, if not frigid; but, with this allowance, Milton's richly sensuous imagination bodies forth the cheerfulness, as he wished to portray it, in a succession of images unsurpassed for beauty. In

the lines descriptive of these images, Art and Nature appear perhaps more than in any other of Milton's poems in perfect equipoise. The images selected are the aptest vehicles of the sentiment; the language in which they are expressed is of the most graceful and musical; while the natural objects themselves are seen at first hand, set down with their edges still sharp, and uncolored by any tinge of bookish allusion. Aspects of English scenery, one after another, occur, which he was the first poet to note, and which none since could dare to touch, so entirely has he made them his own. The mower whetting his scythe, — who ever hears that sound coming from the lawn in the morning without thinking of Milton? "The tanned haycock in the mead;" the cottage chimney smoking betwixt two aged oaks; the moon

> "As if her head she bowed,
> Stooping through a fleecy cloud;"

the shower pattering

> "On the ruffling leaves,
> With minute drops from off the eaves;"

the great curfew-bell heard swinging "over some wide watered shore;" — these are all images taken straight from English landscape which Milton has forever enshrined in his two matchless poems.

Of these two poems, describing the bright and the thoughtful aspects of Nature, my friend Mr. Palgrave, in his exquisite collection of English Lyrics, "The Golden Treasury," has observed

that these are the earliest pure descriptive lyrics in our language, adding that it is a striking proof of Milton's astonishing power that these are still the best, in a style which so many great poets have since his time attempted.

When, after a poetic silence of nearly thirty years, Milton, old, blind, and fallen, as he thought, on evil days, addressed himself again to poetry, in his two Epics, and in his Classic Drama, he gave vent to all that was lofty and sublime in his severe nature, but he returned no more to rural description. Immense scholarship, experience of men and of affairs, ripe meditation on things human and divine, — all these he brought to his later work; but the simple love of Nature, such as it was in his earlier poems, has disappeared, or is overlaid by his learning.[1]

[1] To this assertion I must make one exception. Since these remarks were written, my attention has been kindly drawn by Professor Campbell of St. Andrews to a passage in the ninth book of *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton for a moment reverts to the old rural freshness in something of the manner of his youth. It is the place where the Tempter first catches sight of Eve: —

"Much he the place admired, the person more.
As one who long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight,
The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound;
If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,
What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more,

She most, and in her look seems all delight:
Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold
This flowery flat, the sweet recess of Eve
Thus early, thus alone."

The description of the garden of Eden, in the fourth book of "Paradise Lost," is magnificent, but vague. The pomp of language and profusion of images leaves on the imagination no definite picture. You have, it is true, "in narrow room Nature's whole wealth," but it does not satisfy, as many a humbler but real scene described with a few strokes satisfies. Such landscapes in poetry, entirely projected by the imagination and answering to no scene on earth, are, like the composition pictures, which some painters delight in, only splendid failures.

There is, however, another use made of Nature in those later poems, which may be called the geographical use of it, in which Milton has no rival. His vast reading enabled him to bring together similes and illustrations from every land — from China, India, Tartary, Cape of Good Hope; nor from these only, but from old Rome, Greece, Syria, Babylon. Such images from many lands, so rich, varied, and grandly worded, form one of the most permanent attractions of "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained." The one real inspired creation of scenery, if scenery it can be called, which "Paradise Lost" contains, is the description of Hell. The primeval elements of the world are drawn upon, the unmeas-

urable abyss of fire, the frozen cataract, everything vast that is to be found on earth is here. From things of earth too are drawn the images that set forth the appearance of the inhabitants — the fallen angels like scathed oaks or pines on a blasted heath — Satan himself like leviathan "slumbering on the Norway foam," and many another image from Nature taken to shadow forth things supernatural or infernal.

But if we wish to find in Milton the pure breath of the country, the fragrance of the fields, it is to his early poems we must return. In these, scholar and man of letters though he was, learning and art had not excluded Nature, but with his eye still resting on actual sights of the country, he describes them with a native lightness and grace which his classic style only makes more expressive. During the life of Milton, other though lesser poets had given expression to the love of Nature. Such were William Browne, author of "Britannia's Pastorals," and Andrew Marvell, whose "Poems in the Country" contain here and there graceful expression of rural things.

But after Milton died (1674), rural life and Nature, for more than half a century, disappeared from English poetry.

CHAPTER XII.

RETURN TO NATURE BEGUN BY ALLAN RAMSAY AND THOMSON.

THE divorce from Nature and country life which marked the Poetry of the closing seventeenth and opening eighteenth centuries, has often been subject of comment, and need not detain us now. Whatever the causes of this divorce may have been, it is beside our present purpose to inquire into them. Enough to note the fact that during the latter part of Charles II.'s reign, and during the succeeding reigns of William, Queen Anne, and the first George, poetry retired from the fields, and confined herself to the streets of London. If she ever ventured into the country at all, she did not wander beyond the Twickenham villa or Richmond Hill. While first Dryden and then Pope were in the ascendant, the subjects of poetry were those to be found in city life and in social man. Nature, Passion, Imagination, as has been said, were dismissed; politics, party spirit and argument, wit and satire, criticism and scientific inquiry, took their place.

When after this long absence Poetry once more left the suburbs and wandered back to the fields,

she took with her this great gain, — the power to describe the things of nature in a correcter diction and more beautiful style than England had before known, save only in Milton's descriptive lyrics. It was in the Scottish poet Allan Ramsay that the sense of natural beauty first reappeared. Since his day Nature, which, even when felt and described in earlier English poetry, had held a place altogether subordinate to man, has more and more claimed to be regarded in poetry as almost coequal with man. Ramsay, whose "Gentle Shepherd" was first published in 1725, drew his inspiration in large measure from the songs and ballads of his native country, which, while full of the pathos of human incident and affection, are hardly less sensitive to the looks of earth and sky, whether stern or lovely. It was from his knowledge of rustic life and his love of the popular song that his inspiration was drawn. But his genuine and natural instincts were overlaid by some knowledge and relish of the artificial literature of his age. The result is a kind of composite poetry, in which Scotch manners, feeling, and language are strangely intermingled with a sort of Arcadian veneer, brought from the Eclogues of Virgil, or from English imitations of these. This is most seen in Ramsay's songs, where, instead of preserving the precious old melodies, he has replaced them by insipid counterfeits of his own, in which Jock and Jenny are displaced by Damon and Chloe. Though

some traces of false taste do crop out here and there, even in the dialogue of the "The Gentle Shepherd," yet these are far fewer than in the songs. The feelings of our age may be now and then offended by a freedom of speech that borders on coarseness, but that the texture of the poem is stirring and human-hearted is proved by the hold it still retains on the Scottish peasantry. If here and there a false note mars the truth of the human manners, as when Scotch Lowland shepherds talk of playing on reeds and flutes, the scenery of "The Gentle Shepherd" is true to Nature as it is among the Pentland Hills: —

> "Gae farder up the burn to Habbie's How,
> Where a' the sweets o' spring and summer grow:
> Between twa birks, out o'er a little linn
> The water fa's an' mak's a singin' din;
> A pool breast-deep, beneath as clear as glass,
> Kisses, wi' easy whirls, the bordering grass.
> We 'll end our washing while the morning 's cool.
> And when the day grows het we 'll to the pool,
> There wash oursels — it 's healthfu' now in May,
> And sweetly cauler on so warm a day."

A pool in a burn among the Lowland hills could hardly be more naturally described.

Again, one of the shepherds thus invites his love —

> "To where the saugh-tree shades the mennin-pool,
> I 'll frae the hill come doun, when day grows cool.
> — Keep tryst, and meet me there."

The alder-tree shading the minnow pool — there is a real piece of Lowland scenery brought from the outer world for the first time into poetry.

These are but a few samples of the scenery of Scottish rural life with which "The Gentle Shepherd" abounds. Burns, who lived in the generation that followed Ramsay, and always looks back to him as one of his chief forerunners and masters in the poetic art, fixes on Ramsay's delineations of Nature as one of his chief characteristics. Burns asks, Is there none of the moderns who will rival the Greeks in pastoral poetry? —

> "Yes! there is ane; a Scottish callan —
> There 's ane; come forrit, honest Allan!
> Thou need na jouk behint the hallan,
> A chiel sae clever;
> The teeth o' Time may gnaw Tantallan,
> But thou 's forever!
>
> "Thou paints auld Nature to the nines,
> In thy sweet Caledonian lines;
> Nae gowden stream thro' myrtles twines,
> Where Philomel,
> While nightly breezes sweep the vines,
> Her griefs will tell!
>
> "In gowany glens thy burnie strays,
> Where bonnie lasses bleach their claes;
> Or trots by hazelly shaws and braes
> Wi' hawthorns gray,
> Where blackbirds join the shepherd's lays
> At close o' day."

It may well be that when we turn to Scottish poetry the burns and braes should sing and shine through almost every song. For there is no feature in which Scottish scenery more differs from English than in the clear and living northern

burns, compared with the dead drumlie ditches called brooks in the Midland Counties.

THOMSON.

The return to Nature, begun by Ramsay in his "Gentle Shepherd," was carried on by another Scot, though hardly a Scottish poet — Thomson, who a few years later (1728–30) published his poem of "The Seasons." In this work, descriptive of scenery and country life through the four seasons, Thomson, it is alleged, was but working in a vein which was native to Scottish poets from the earliest time. Two centuries before, Gawain Douglas, in the prologues to his translation of the Æneid, abounds in description of rural things. I should hardly venture to say it myself, in case it might seem national prejudice, but a writer who is not a Scot, Mr. S. Brooke, has remarked that there is "a passionate, close, poetical observation and description of natural scenery in Scotland, from the earliest times, such as we do not possess in English poetry till the time of Wordsworth." In choosing his subject, therefore, and in the minute loving way in which he dwells upon it, Thomson would seem to have been working in the spirit of his country. But there the Scottish element in him begins and ends. Neither in the kind of landscape he pictures, in the rural customs he selects, nor in the language or versification of his poem, is there much savor of Scottish habits or scenery. His blank verse cannot

be said to be a garment that fits well to its subject. It is heavy, cumbrous, oratorical, overloaded with epithets, full of artificial invocations, "personified abstractions," and insipid classicalities. It is a composite style of language formed from the recollection partly of Milton, partly of Virgil's Georgics.

Yet in spite of all these obstructions which repel pure taste and natural feeling, no one can read the four books of the "Seasons" through, without seeing that Thomson, for all his false style, wrote with his eye upon Nature, and laid his finger on many a fact and image never before touched in poetry. In the first few lines of "Spring" he notes how, at its approach, the plover and other birds which have wintered by the sea leave the shores and set far inland to their summer haunts in moors and hills. Whilst the season is still hanging uncertain between winter and spring, he notes how

> "Scarce
> The bittern knows his time, with bill ingulfed
> To shake the sounding marsh; or, from the shore,
> The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
> And sing their wild notes to the listening waste."

How true to nature this picture! how happily rendered! Then you have the plowman and his oxen beginning their work —

> "Cheered by the simple song and soaring lark."

Again, —

> "From the moist meadow to the withered hill,
> Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs."

That "withered hill!" Who that has ever looked on the mountains in March, just before the first finger of Spring has touched them, but will recognize the appropriateness of that epithet for their wan, bleached, decayed aspect!

Then you have the whole process of trout-fishing, in the "mossy-tinctured stream," where "the dark brown water aids the grilse," showing that, as Thomson wrote, his thoughts reverted from Richmond to the streams of the Merse; you have also the song-birds piping each from its proper haunt, the linnet from "the flowering furze," — the various places where each bird builds his nest, given with an accuracy that every bird-nesting boy will recognize; and the scent of the bean-fields, noticed for the first time, as far as I know, in poetry.

As one longer example of Thomson's close observation and peculiar manner, take the description of a spring shower: —

"At last
The clouds consign their treasures to the fields,
And, softly shaking on the dimpled pool
Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow
In large effusion o'er the freshened world;
The stealing shower is scarce to patter heard
By such as wander through the forest walks,
Beneath the umbrageous multitude of leaves.

. . . . . .

"Thus all day long the full-distended clouds
Indulge their genial stores, and well-showered earth
Is deep enriched with vegetable life;
Till in the western sky the downward sun
Looks out, effulgent, from amid the flush

Of broken clouds, gay shifting to his beam,
The rapid radiance instantaneous strikes
The illumined mountain; through the forest streams;
Shakes on the floods, and in a yellow mist,
Far smoking o'er the interminable plain,
In twinkling myriads lights the dewy gems.
Moist, bright, and green, the landscape laughs around.
Full swell the woods, their every music wakes,
Mixed in wild concert, with the warbling brooks
Increased, the distant bleatings of the hills,
And hollow lows responsive from the vales,
Whence, blending all, the sweetened zephyr springs."

These are but a few samples from "Spring" showing the minute faithfulness with which Thomson had observed

"The negligence of Nature, wide and wild."

Here are appearances of Nature, each accurately observed, and their succession truthfully rendered, but the whole is so overlaid with tawdry diction that it is hard to pierce below the enamel and feel the true pulse of Nature beating under it. And yet it does beat there, and in many another description in the "Seasons" now little heeded, because of their old-fashioned garb. And yet he who will read the "Seasons" through will find many a phrase true to Nature, many a felicitous expression cropping out from the even roll of his solemn pompous monotone. Thomson has been called the Claude of poets. And his way of handling Nature stands to that of Wordsworth or Tennyson much as Claude's landscapes do to those of Turner or some of the other modern painters. It may be added that Thomson's some-

what vapid digressions about Amelia and Lavinia have not more meaning than the conventional lay figures and the classic temples which Claude introduces into the foreground of his landscapes.

As to the sentiment which animates the "Seasons," it is a revolt from the life of town and court to the simplicity and truth of rural life and feeling. It is almost the first time this revolt finds expression in English poetry, if we except some of the sylvan scenes in Shakespeare. As the French critic well says, "Thirty years before Rousseau, Thomson had expressed all Rousseau's sentiments, almost in the same style. Like him, he painted the country with sympathy and enthusiasm. Like him he contrasted the golden age of primitive simplicity with modern miseries and corruption. Like him he exalted deep love, conjugal tenderness, the union of souls, paternal affection, and all domestic joys. Like him, he combated contemporary frivolity and compared the ancient republics with modern states. Like Rousseau, he praised gravity, patriotism, liberty, virtue; rose from the spectacle of Nature to the contemplation of God. . . . . Like him, too, he marred the sincerity of his emotion and the truth of his poetry by sentimental vapidities, by pastoral billing and cooing, and by an abundance of epithets, personified abstractions, pompous invocations, and oratorical tirades." This passage gives truly, if with some exaggeration, the spirit with which the "Seasons" and all

their outward imagery are informed. But while Thomson watched the ever-changing appearances and recorded them, what, it may be asked, was his thought about the Power which originates and upholds them? what did he conceive to be the relation of the things we see to the things we do not see? Everywhere his poem breathes a spirit of naturalistic piety. But if there is nothing in the "Seasons" inconsistent with Christian truth, there is little or nothing that directly affirms it. In "Winter" he breathes this prayer —

> "Father of light and life! thou Good Supreme!
> Oh teach me what is good! teach me thyself!
> Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,
> From every low pursuit! and feed my soul
> With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure,
> Sacred, substantial, never-fading bliss!"

There is nothing in his amiable and placid life to throw doubt on the sincerity of that prayer. And yet Thomson's piety seems to us now of that kind which is easily satisfied and thoughtlessly thankful!

There are many at the present day, and those the most thoughtful, who "not only see through but (as has been said) feel a strong revulsion against the well-meant but superficial attempt to describe the world as happy, and to see in God, as the Governor of it, only a sort of easy and shallow goodness." They cannot be satisfied with such a view. "They have a complaining within — a sense of imperfection in and around them which rebels against so easy-going a view and demands

another solution. It is not merely a benevolent God that they long for, but a God who sympathizes with man, and who in some way, of which only revelation can fully inform us, makes out of man's misery and imperfection the way to something better for him."

Thomson's religion, no doubt, could hardly have escaped the infection of the Deism that was all around him in the literary and philosophic atmosphere of his time. In his beautiful "Hymn," which may be regarded as the climax of the "Seasons," and as summing up the devoutest thoughts which these suggested to him, there is nothing that goes beyond such a view: —

> "These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God. The rolling year
> Is full of thee" —

unless perhaps in that more Christian strain where, hearing the bleating on the hills and the lowings in the vale, he breaks forth —

> "For the Great Shepherd reigns,
> And his unsuffering Kingdom yet will come."

The prevailing spirit of the Hymn, as of most of his other addresses to the Deity, is that of optimism and the reign of universal benevolence: —

> "I cannot go
> Where Universal Love smiles not around,
> Sustaining all yon orbs, and all their suns,
> From seeming evil still educing good."

There is much benevolence in his poetry, much feeling for the miseries and wrongs of mankind,

but no perception of that deeper mystery — that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, waiting for a deliverance. Neither is there any sense of the relation of the creation to the Creator other than that which the somewhat mechanical conception of a maker and a machine supply. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that Thomson does not seem to feel the inadequacy of this conception, for we in our own day, who have got to feel so profoundly its inadequacy, have not as yet gone far to supply its place with a worthier. Yet whatever may be his shortcomings, all honor to the poet of the "Seasons"! Genuine lover of the country as he was, he was the first English poet who led poetry back into the fields, and made her once more free of her own native region.

CHAPTER XIII.

NATURE IN COLLINS, GRAY, GOLDSMITH, AND BURNS.

COLLINS.

When Thomson was laid in Richmond Church, another poet chanted over him a dirge breathing the very pathos of Nature herself: —

> "In yonder grave a Druid lies,
> Where slowly winds the stealing wave,
> The year's best sweets shall duteous rise
> To deck its poet's sylvan grave.
>
> "Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore,
> When Thames in summer wreaths is drest,
> And oft suspend the dashing oar
> To bid his gentle spirit rest."

About that ode of the gentle and pensive Collins (born 1721, died 1759) there is a sweet pathetic tone which the grander strains of later English poetry have never surpassed. In the "Dirge over Fidele" the same strain of pensive beauty is renewed. Collins was the first poet since Milton wrote his early lyrics who brought to the description of rural things that perfection of style, that combined simplicity and beauty, which Milton had learned from the classic poets

There is another poem of Collins's which, if not so perfect in expression as the two just named, is interesting as almost the earliest inroad by an English poet into the wild and romantic world which the Highlands of Scotland contain, unless we except Shakespeare's "Macbeth." This is Collins's ode on the "Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland." It seems that in the autumn of 1749, Home, the author of the tragedy of "Douglas," had, when on a visit to London, during his brief stay made the acquaintance of Collins, and kindled his imagination with tales of the Highlands and the Hebrides. Collins seems to have deepened this interest by the perusal of Martin's curious book on the Western Isles, and on Home's return to Scotland Collins addressed to him the ode, in which the English poet entered with a deeper, more imaginative insight into the weird and wild superstitions of the Gael than any Scottish poet had as yet shown. After describing with great force and truthfulness the second sight, the wraith, the water-kelpie, and many such-like things, he closes with this apostrophe: —

> "All hail! ye scenes that o'er my soul prevail!
> Ye splendid friths and lakes, which, far away,
> Are by smooth Annan filled, or pastoral Tay,
> Or Don's romantic springs, at distance hail!
> The time shall come, when I, perhaps, may tread
> Your lowly glens, o'erhung with spreading broom;
> Or, o'er your stretching heaths, by fancy led;
> Or, o'er your mountains creep, in awful gloom."

Poor Collins! this hope was never fulfilled. A deeper gloom than any that rests on the Highland mountains too soon gathered over him. The ode itself does not seem to have received the notice it deserves, both for its own excellence and as the first symptom of a new and enlarged feeling about Nature entering into English poetry. In the above extract the word "glen" occurs. Is there any earlier instance of its use in English poetry or prose? The Scottish poets, except the ballad-writers, were afraid to use it till the time of Scott. Macpherson in his translations of Ossian, twelve years later than this ode, uniformly renders the Gaelic "gleann" by the insipid "vale."

But the most perfect and original poem of Collins, as well as the most finely appreciative of Nature, is his Ode to Evening. No doubt evening is personified in his address as "maid composed," and "calm votaress," but the personification is so delicately handled, and in so subdued a tone, that it does not jar on the feelings, as such personifications too often do: —

"If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales,

"O nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed:

"Now air is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat
With short, shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing ;
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

"As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in needless hum :
Now teach me, maid composed,
To breathe some softened strain.

. . . . . .

"Then lead, calm votaress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallowed pile,
Or upland fallows gray
Reflect its last cool gleam.

"But when chill, blustering winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
That from the mountain's side,
Views wilds, and swelling floods,

"And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,
And hears the simple bell, and marks o'er all,
Thy dewy finger draw
The gradual dusky veil."

There is about the whole ode a subdued twilight tone, a remoteness from men and human things, and a pensive evening musing, all the more expressive, because it does not shape itself into definite thoughts, but reposes in appropriate images. And, as the Aldine biographer observes, — "The absence of rhyme leaves the even flow of the verse unbroken, and the change at the end of each stanza into shorter lines, as if the voice of the reader dropped into a lower key, contributes to the effect."

In Thomson there was probably an observation

of the facts of Nature wider and more varied, but in Collins there is an intermingling of human feeling with Nature's aspects which is at once more delicate and deep.

The increased sensibility to Nature which in English poetry appeared in Thomson, was carried on through the eighteenth century to its close by Collins, Gray, Goldsmith, and Cowper, and manifested itself in each of these poets in a way characteristic of himself.

GRAY.

In Collins we have seen Nature described with a perfect grace of language and a penetrating of the forms and colors of things with human sentiment, that far outwent the minute and faithful descriptions of Thomson. This same movement was maintained, I cannot say advanced, by Gray. That he had a fine feeling for Nature is apparent in his letters, which show more minute observation and greater descriptive power than his poetry. In these the beautiful scenery around the Westmoreland Lakes finds the earliest notice.

In dealing with scenery, as with other things, Nature without Art, and Art without Nature, are alike inadequate. To hit the balance is no easy task. To let in Nature fully upon the heart, by means of an art which is colorless and unperceived — this English poetry was struggling toward, and Gray helped it forward, though he himself only attained partial success. Often the art

is too apparent; a false classicism is sometimes thrust in between the reader and the fresh outer world. Wordsworth has laid hold of a sonnet of Gray's as a text to preach against false poetic diction. And yet Gray, notwithstanding his often too elaborate diction, deserves better of lovers of English poetry than to have his single sonnet thus gibbeted, merely because, instead of saying the sun rises, it makes

"Reddening Phœbus lift his golden fire."

In the ode on Spring, it is "the rosy-bosomed hours, fair Venus' train," which bring spring in. Venus is thrust between you and the advent of spring, much as Adversity is made "the daughter of Jove." For the nightingale we have "the Attic warbler," as in another ode, for the yellow corn-fields we have "Ceres' golden reign." It is needless to say how abhorrent this sort of stuff is to the modern feeling about Nature. And yet, notwithstanding these blemishes, Gray did help forward the movement to a more perfect and adequate style, in which Nature should come direct to the heart, through a perfectly transparent medium of art. When he is at his best, as in the Elegy, Nature and human feeling so perfectly combine that the mind finds in all the images satisfaction and relief. There is in the Elegy no image from Greece or Rome, no intrusive heathen deity, to jar upon the feeling. From the common English landscape alone is drawn all that is needed to minister to the quiet but deep pathos of the whole.

The line of poets who carried on the description of Nature during the last century, Collins, Gray, Goldsmith, and Cowper, much as they differ, have this in common. Their style, though each had his own, was in all formed by a more or less intimate study of the classic poets. And they regarded Nature, all more or less, in a meditative moralizing way. They were all thoughtful, cultivated men, with convictions and sentiments of their own — sentiments mainly of a grave cast, — they saw Nature through the light of these sentiments, and sought out those scenes and images in Nature which suited their habitual mood. None of them are born children of Nature, knowing her face before they could read or write. They were lovers of books before they became lovers of the country. Hence there is in them no rapture in the presence of Nature. For that we shall have to look elsewhere than to those scholarly gentlemen.

GOLDSMITH.

The amiable and versatile Goldsmith looks at Nature, as he passes along, with a less moralizing eye than the sombre-minded Gray. In his earliest long poem, "The Traveller," published in 1765, though he surveys many lands, his eye dwells on man and society rather than on the outward world. In remarkable contrast to more recent English poets, though he passes beneath the shadow of the Alps, he looks up to them with

shuddering horror rather than with any kindling of soul. The mountain glory had not yet burst on the souls of men. The one thought that strikes him is the hard lot of the mountaineers. Such conventional lines as these are all that he has for the mountains themselves : —

> "No vernal blooms their torpid rocks array,
> But winter lingers in the lap of May ;
> No zephyr fondly sues the mountain's breast,
> But meteors glare, and stormy glooms invest."

It is only when he thinks of the Switzer's love for them that they become interesting : —

> "Dear is the shed to which his soul conforms,
> And dear that hill which lifts him to the storms ;
> And as a child, when scaring sounds molest,
> Clings close and closer to his mother's breast,
> So the loud torrent, and the whirlwind's roar,
> But bind him to his native mountains more."

This poem, however, is remarkable as the first expression in English verse of that personal interest in foreign scenes and people which has kindled so many a splendid strain of our more recent poetry. But it is in "The Deserted Village," his best known poem, that he has most fully shown the grace and truthfulness with which he could touch natural scenes. Lissoy, an Irish village where the poet's brother had a living, is said to have been the original from which he drew. In the poem, the church which crowns the neighboring hill, the mill, the brook, the hawthorn-tree, are all taken straight from the outer world. The features of Nature and the

works of man, the parsonage, the school-house, the ale-house, all harmonize in one picture, and though the feeling of desolation must needs be a melancholy one, yet it is wonderfully varied and relieved by the uncolored faithfulness of the pictures from Nature and the kindly humor of those of man. It is needless to quote from a poem which every one knows so well. The verse of Pope is not the best vehicle for rural description, but it never was employed with greater grace and transparency than in "The Deserted Village." In that poem there is fine feeling for Nature, in her homely forms, and truthful description of these, but beyond this Goldsmith does not venture. The pathos of the outward world in its connection with man is there, but no reference to the meaning of Nature in itself, much less any question of its relation to the Divine Being and a supersensible world.

COWPER.

Though Collins, Gray, and Goldsmith, each in his own way, turned their eye on rural scenery, and took beautiful pictures and images from it into their poetry, yet it was none of these, but a later poet, Cowper, who, as the true successor of Thomson, carried on the descriptive work which he began. It was in 1730 that the first complete edition of the "Seasons" appeared. "The Task" was published in 1785. This is the poem in which Cowper most fully put forth his power as

a rural poet. In the first book, "The Sofa," he thus quaintly makes the first plunge from indoor to outdoor life, to which many a time ere the long poem is ended he returns: —

> "The Sofa suits
> The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,
> Though on a sofa, may I never feel:
> For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
> Of grassy swarth, close cropped by nibbling sheep,
> And skirted thick with intertexture firm
> Of thorny boughs; have loved the rural walk
> O'er hills, through valleys, and by river's brink,
> E'er since, a truant boy, I passed my bounds,
> To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames;
> And still remember, nor without regret,
> Of hours that sorrow since has much endeared,
> How oft, my slice of pocket-store consumed,
> Still hungering, penniless, and far from home,
> I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,
> Or blushing crabs, and berries that emboss
> The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere."

This, the first rural passage in the "Task," strikes the note of difference between Cowper's way of describing Nature and Thomson's; Cowper unhesitatingly introduces the personal element, describes actual and individual scenes as he himself saw them in his morning or evening walk. Or when rural scenes are not thus personally introduced, they everywhere come in as interludes in the midst of the poet's keen interest in human affairs, his quiet and delicate humor, his tender sympathy with the poor and the suffering, his indignation against human wrong, his earnest brooding over human destiny, and his

forward glances to a time when visible things will give place to a higher and brighter order. Thomson, on the other hand, describes Nature as seen by itself, separate and apart from human passion, or relieved only by some vapid episodes of a false Arcadianism. Hence, great as is Thomson's merit for having, first of his age, gone back to Nature, the interest he awakes in it is feeble, because with him Nature is so divorced from individuality and from man. It is Nature in the general rather than the individual scene which he describes — Nature aloof from rather than combined with man. But her full depth and tenderness she never reveals except to the heart that throbs with human interest.

But though Cowper sees the outer world as set off against his own personal moods and the interests of man, yet he does not allow these to discolor his scenes or to blur the exactness of their outlines. Fidelity, absolute veracity, characterize his descriptions. He himself says that he took nothing at second-hand, and all his pictures bear witness to this. Homely, of course, flat, tame, was the country he dwelt in and described. But to this day that Huntingdonshire landscape, and the flats by the sluggish Ouse, in themselves so unbeautiful, acquire a charm to the eye of the traveler from the remembered poetry of the "Task" and for the sake of him who wrote it. By that poetry it may be said that he

"For scenes not beautiful did more
Than beauty for the fairest scenes can do."

As one out of many landscapes described, take this: —

"How oft upon yon eminence our pace
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,
While admiration, feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.
Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned,
The distant plow slow-moving, and beside
His laboring team, that swerved not from the track,
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy!
Here Ouse, slow-winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlooked, our favorite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
Displaying, on its varied side, the grace
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear,
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.
Scenes must be beautiful which, daily viewed,
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.
Praise justly due to those that I describe."

An ordinary prospect, you say, described in very ordinary poetry. Yes, but the scene is a real scene, one of England's veritable landscapes, and the lines which describe it are genuine poetry, — exact, transparent, lingering lovingly

over the scene which the eye rests on. And for its being ordinary description, no doubt it flows easily and naturally along, but let any one try to describe as common a prospect in verse, and he will find that this is not ordinary verse, but instinct with that unobtrusive grace which only true poets attain.

Then how frequently the commonest country sights awaken Cowper's touch of native humor. Here is what he says of the mole and his work: we —

> "Feel at every step
> Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,
> Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.
> He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,
> Disfigures earth, and, plotting in the dark,
> Toils much to earn a monumental pile
> That may record the mischiefs he has done."

In Keble's "Essay on Sacred Poetry" I lately read the following comparison between Cowper and Burns as descriptive poets. "Compare," he says, "the landscapes of Cowper with those of Burns. There is, if we mistake not, the same sort of difference between them, as in the conversation of two persons on scenery, the one originally an enthusiast in his love of the works of Nature, the other, driven by disappointment or weariness to solace himself with them as he might. . . . . The one all-overflowing with the love of Nature, and indicating at every turn, that whatever his lot in life, he could not have been happy without her; the other visibly and wisely

soothing himself, but not without effort, by attending to rural objects in default of some more congenial happiness, of which he had almost come to despair. The latter, in consequence, laboriously sketching every object that came in his way; the other, in one or two rapid lines which operate, as it were, like a magician's spell, presenting to the fancy just that picture which was wanted to put the reader's mind in unison with the writer's." And then Keble quotes, in illustration of the difference, the description of Evening in the fourth book of the "Task," set over against the truly pastoral chant of "Dainty Davie." I cannot regard this estimate of the two poets as altogether true. The passage which Keble quotes from Cowper is not one of his happiest. "Evening" is there personified in conventional fashion, as "with matron-step slow moving," with night treading "on her sweeping train." If the two poets are to be compared at all, let it be when both are at their best. Again, is it quite fair to contrast poetry of description with the poetry of lyric passion, and to reject the former because it does not possess the vivid glow that belongs to the latter? Moreover, the country which Cowper had before him suited better a sober and meditative than an impassioned strain. There can be no doubt that Cowper turned to Nature as a relief and solace from too sad thoughts rather than with the rapture of a fresh heart and a youthful love. But Keble surely

would have been the last to deny that this is a legitimate use to make of Nature. He, before most men, would have felt that that is one of the finest ministries of Nature which Cowper thus expresses : —

> "Our groves were planted to console at noon
> The pensive wanderer in their shades, at eve
> The moonbeam, sliding softly in between
> The sleeping leaves is all the light they wish,
> Birds warbling all the music."

If it be one of Nature's offices to make the young and the happy happier, it is her no less genuine and beneficent work to lighten, by her glad or reposeful looks, aged hearts that may be world-weary or desponding.

How exact, faithful, and literally true in his record of the appearances of Nature Cowper is, we have seen. It remains to ask whether he had any philosophy of Nature, and if so, what it was. It could not be that one so devout could look habitually on the face of Nature without asking himself how all this visible vastness stands related to the Invisible One whom his heart held commune with. All remember his well-known line, —

> "God made the country, but man made the town,"

and this thought echoes through all his praises of the country, and enhances his pleasure in it. But it is not only by incidental allusion that Cowper lets us know his thoughts on these

things. The "Task" contains two long passages, one in the "Winter Morning Walk," from line 733 to 906, and another in "The Winter Walk at Noon," from line 181 to 254, in which his feelings on this subject find full utterance, opening with the noble words, —

> "He is the freeman whom the Truth makes free,
> And all are slaves beside."

In the former passage, of the man whose heart is set free with this heavenly freedom he says, in words well known,

> "He looks abroad into the varied field
> Of Nature, and . . . .
> Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
> His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
> And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy
> With a propriety that none can feel,
> But who, with filial confidence inspired,
> Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
> And smiling say, 'My Father made them all.'"

And so throughout this whole passage he continues in a strain akin to that of Thomson's Hymn, but more intimate and devout, his acknowledgment of Him whom he calls "The only just Proprietor" of Nature. It is He who alike

> "Gives its lustre to an insect's wing,
> And wheels his throne upon the rolling worlds."

When He has enlightened the eye and touched the mortal ear —

> "In that blest moment, Nature throwing wide
> Her veil opaque, discloses with a smile
> The Author of her beauties, who, retired

Behind his own creation, works unseen
By the impure, and hears his word denied.

. . . . . .

"But, O thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!
Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor,
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

A finer strain of rapturous piety could not be, but yet in it all there is no advance beyond the old conception of a dead mechanical world, which God, himself removed aloof, moves entirely from without. There is no hint that Nature is alive with a life received from God himself, and mysteriously connected with Him.

But in the second passage alluded to his thought about Nature takes a higher reach. Speaking of the revival of the earth under the touch of spring, he teaches that

"There lives and moves
A soul in all things, and that soul is God."

Then, alluding to the view, entertained by many, then as now, that what we call Nature's operations are upheld and carried forward by fixed laws, which spare the Maker all further trouble, he asserts that all things are impelled

"To ceaseless service by a ceaseless force,
And under pressure of some conscious cause.
The Lord of all, Himself through all diffused,
Sustains, and is the life of all that lives.
Nature is but a name for an effect
Whose cause is God."

Nor does he stop at this merely theistic view.

He goes on to the distinctly Christian teaching of St. John and St. Paul, so easy to assert, so hard to take home to the feelings and imagination, that it is the Eternal and Incarnate Word who is the Creator and Sustainer of this visible universe.

> "All are under One. One Spirit — his
> Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows —
> Rules universal Nature. Not a flower
> But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,
> Of his unrivaled pencil."

No doubt Cowper held and believed this firmly, and it may be at times had keen intuition of its truth. But it cannot be said that he attained to make it felt in his ordinary descriptions of the every-day landscape. He does not describe Nature as if he habitually saw it as a living being plastic to an overruling and informing spirit. Rather he beheld her more as common eyes behold her, as a mechanism, with fixed features and a definite outline, which do not spontaneously, and without an exertion of thought, lend themselves as vehicles of spiritual reality. If he had been more possessed with the mystical vision he might have been a higher poet for the few. He would not have been what he has been called, the best of our descriptive poets for every-day wear, the familiar companion of every quiet English household. But though Cowper's "Task" is full of scenery, it is not purely, or even mainly, descriptive poetry. More than its rural character is its deep, tender, universal human-heartedness.

Man and his interests are paramount, as paramount as in Pope or any other city poet. Only it is not the conventional, not the surface part of man, but that which is permanent in him and universal. In his indignation against injustice and oppression, his hatred of slavery, his large sense of universal brotherhood, and his revolt against all that hinders it, we already hear in his poetry the not far-off murmur of the Revolution, and of the new era it was bringing in. His denunciation of the Bastile but four years before it fell —

> "Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts,
> Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair,
> There 's not an English heart that would not leap
> To hear that ye were fallen at last," —

is a fitting prelude to that prayer of thanksgiving which Wordsworth raised a few years afterward from Morecombe Sands when he first heard of the fall of Robespierre. It is because Cowper's poetry throbs with this deep and universal human sympathy that its background of landscape, plain as it is, and untransfigured by passion, comes in with such graceful and refreshing relief. Of Cowper's descriptions may be said what Wordsworth says of his own, there is always

> "Some happy tone
> Of meditation slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone."

And this it is that gives them their peculiar charm.

BURNS.

The rural descriptions and the reflections on the outer world contained in the poetry of Cowper, mark the highest limit which the feeling for Nature had reached in England at the close of last century. But the stream of natural poetry in England, which up to that time had been fed from purely native sources, and which had flowed on through all last century with ever increasing volume, received toward the close of the century affluents from other regions, which tinged the color and modified the direction of its future current. Of these affluents the first and most powerful was the poetry of Burns. It is strange to think that Cowper and he were singing their songs at the same time, each in his own way describing the scenery that surrounded him, and yet that they hardly knew of each other's existence.

Burns not only lived in a world of nature, of society, and of feeling, wholly alien to that of Cowper, but he took for his models far different poets. These models were the Scottish rhymers, Allan Ramsay, Ferguson, and the unknown singers of the native ballads, and especially of the popular songs, of his country. Proud and self-reliant as Burns was, he everywhere speaks of Ramsay and Ferguson as his models and superiors. From these he took the forms of his poems, though into these forms he poured a new and

stronger inspiration. Burns's "Halloween" is framed on a model of Ferguson's poem called "Leith Races," and "The Cottar's Saturday Night" is evidently suggested by Ferguson's "Farmer's Ingle;" but poor Ferguson's very mundane view of happiness is, at least in the "Cottar's Saturday Night," by Burns, transfigured by a purer and nobler sentiment. Besides these Burns knew the English poets, such as Pope and Shenstone, but well for the world that he did not come too early under their influence, else we had probably lost much of what is most native and original in him. Somewhere in his later years he marvels at his own audacity in having ventured to use his native Scotch as the vehicle for poetry, and speaks as if, had he earlier known more English literature, he would not have dared to do so. Yet when he does essay to write pure English his poetry becomes only of third or fourth-rate excellence, just as nothing can be more mawkish and vapid than Ferguson, when he makes Damon and Alexis discourse in his purely English pastorals. Only in one poem, written in pure English, does Burns attain high excellence, and that one is the "Lines to Mary in Heaven." Perhaps in nothing, except it may be in humorous or pathetic feeling, is the Scottish dialect more in place than in describing the native scenery. For, in truth, the features of every county, if possible of each district, ought to be rendered in the very words by which they are

known to the natives. When instead of this they are transferred into the literary language, they have lost I know not how much of their life and individuality. If in Scottish scenery, for instance, you speak of a brook and a grove, instead of a burn or a shaw or wood, you have really robbed the locality described of all that belongs to it. The same thing holds still more of mountain scenery, in which, unless you adopt the words which the country people apply to their own hills, you had better leave them undescribed. This feeling has at last forced both poets, and all who attempt to render Highland scenery, to use the Celtic words by which the mountain lineaments are described. We must, if we would name these features at all, speak of the "corrie," the "lochan," the "balloch," and the "screetan" or "sclidder," for the book-English has no words for these things. Hence it is that Scottish Lowland scenery is never so truly and vividly described, as when Burns uses his own vernacular. And yet Burns was no merely descriptive poet. It would be difficult to name one of his poems in which description of Nature is the main object. Everywhere with him, man, his feelings and his fate, stand out in the front of his pictures, and Nature comes in as the delightful background — yet Nature loved with a love, beheld with a rapture, all the more genuine, because his pulses throbbed in such intense sympathy with man. Every one can recall many a wonderful line,

sometimes whole verse, in his love-songs, in which the surrounding landscape is flashed on the mind's eye. In that longer poem, so full of sagacious observation on life and character, "The Twa Dogs," how graphically rendered is the evening with which the poem closes! —

> "By this, the sun was out o' sight,
> An' darker gloamin brought the night:
> The bum-clock humm'd wi' lazy drone,
> The kye stood rowtin i' the loan;
> When up they gat, an' shook their lugs,
> Rejoiced they were na men but dogs;
> An' each took aff his several way,
> Resolved to meet some ither day."

"The kye stood rowting in the loan," what a picture is that of an old-fashioned Lowland farm, with the loane or lane, between two dikes, leading up to the out-field or moor! All who have known the reality will at once recognize the truth of the picture, in which the kye, as they come home at gloamin', stop and low, ere they enter the byre: to others it is uncommunicable.

Or take that description in "Halloween" of the burn and the adventure there: —

> "Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,
> As thro' the glen it wimpl't;
> Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays;
> Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't;
> Whyles glitter'd to the nightly rays,
> Wi' bickering, dancing dazzle;
> Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
> Below the spreading hazel,
> Unseen that night.

"Amang the brachens on the brae,
Between her an' the moon,
The Deil, or else an outler Quey,
Gat up an' gae a croon:
Poor Leezie's heart maist lap the hool;
Near lav'rock-height she jumpit,
But mist a fit, an' in the pool
Out-owre the lugs she plumpit,
Wi' a plunge that night."

Would any one who can feel the force of that description allow that it could be expressed in literary English without losing much of its charm?

I have said that Burns's glances at Nature are almost all incidental, and, by the way, and this enhances their value. There is, however, a passage in an Epistle to William Simpson, in which he addresses Nature directly, and speaks out more consciously the feeling with which she inspired him: —

"O, sweet are Coila's haughs an' woods,
When lintwhites chant amang the buds,
And jinkin hares, in amorous whids,
Their loves enjoy,
While thro' the braes the cushat croods
Wi' wailfu' cry!

"Ev'n winter bleak has charms to me
When winds rave thro' the naked tree;
Or frosts on hills of Ochiltree
Are hoary gray;
Or blinding drifts wild-furious flee,
Dark'ning the day!

"O Nature! a' thy shews and forms
To feeling, pensive hearts hae charms!
Whether the summer kindly warms
Wi' life an' light,

Or winter howls, in gusty storms,
The lang, dark night!

"The Muse, nae Poet ever fand her,
Till by himsel he learn'd to wander,
Adown some trottin burn's meander,
An' no think lang;
O sweet, to stray an' pensive ponder
A heart-felt sang!"

Three things may be noted as to the influence of Burns on men's feeling for Nature.

First, he was a more entirely open-air poet than any first-rate singer who had yet lived, and as such he dealt with Nature in a more free, close, intimate way than any English poet since the old ballad-singers. He did more to bring the hearts of men close to the outer world, and the outer world to the heart, than any former poet. His keen eye looked directly, with no intervening medium, on the face alike of Nature and of man, and embraced all creation in one large sympathy. With familiar tenderness he dwelt on the lower creatures, felt for their sufferings, as if they had been his own, and opened men's hearts to feel how much the groans of creation are needlessly increased by the indifference or cruelty of man. In Burns, as in Cowper, and in him perhaps more than in Cowper, there was a large going forth of tenderness to the lower creatures, and in their poetry this first found utterance, and in no poet since their time, so fully as in these two.

Secondly, his feeling in Nature's presence was not, as in the English poets of his time, a quiet

contemplative pleasure. It was nothing short of rapture. Other more modern poets may have been thrilled with the same delight, he alone of all in last century expressed the thrill. In this, as in other things, he is the truest herald of that strain of rejoicing in Nature, even to ecstasy, which has formed one of the finest tones in the poetry of this century.

Thirdly, he does not philosophize on Nature or her relation to man; he feels it, alike in his joyful moods and in his sorrowful. It is to him part of what he calls "the universal plan," but he nowhere reasons about the life of Nature as he often does so trenchantly about that of man.

THE BALLADS.

But another affluent to the growing sentiment, besides Burns, was the ballad-poetry rediscovered, we may say, towards the end of last century. The most decisive mark of this change in literary taste was the collection by Bishop Percy of the "Reliques of Ancient Poetry" in 1765; and this production did much to deepen and expand the taste out of which itself arose. The impulse which began with Bishop Percy may be said to have culminated when Scott gave to the world his "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," in the opening years of the present century.

The ballads of course are mainly engaged with human incidents, heroic and legendary. Yet they contain many side-glances at Nature, as it inter-

wove itself with the actions or the sufferings of men, which are very affecting. This is the way that the sight of Ettrick Forest struck the king and his men as they marched against the outlaw who "won" there —

> "The king was cuming thro' Caddon Ford,
> And full five thousand men was he;
> They saw the derke Foreste them before,
> They thought it awsome for to see."

Or take again the impression made on the traveling knight as he comes on Clyde in full flood: —

> "As he gaed owre yon high high hill
> And doun yon dowie den,
> There was a roar in Clyde water,
> Had fear'd a hundred men."

Or that other gentler pathetic touch, where the maiden says —

> "Yestreen I dreamed a dolefu' dream
> I fear there will be sorrow,
> I dreamed I pu'd the heather green
> Wi' my true love, on Yarrow.
>
> "O gentle wind, that bloweth south,
> From where my love repaireth,
> Convey a kiss from his dear mouth,
> And tell me how he fareth!"

In verses such as these, which abound throughout the popular ballads and songs, we see the outer world, not as it appeared to the highly educated poet, seeking to express it in artistic phrase, but as it showed itself to the eyes and hearts of country-people, living quite familiarly among its

sights and sounds. Much more might be said of the natural imagery of the ballads, and of the feeling toward the outer world indicated by it. Suffice it to note that the simplicity and pathos, both of sentiment and of expression, which the ballads contained, entering, with other influences, into the minds of the young generation which first welcomed them, called up another view of Nature than that which the literary poets had expressed, and affected most deeply both the feeling and the form of the new poetry of Nature which this century brought in.

OSSIAN.

One more poetic influence, born of last century, must be noticed before we close. I mean the Celtic or Ossianic feeling about Nature.

I am not going now to discuss whether Macpherson composed the Gaelic poems which still pass for Ossian's, or whether he only collected songs which had been floated down by tradition from a remote antiquity. Whichever view we take, it cannot be questioned that the appearance of this poetry gave to the English-speaking mind the thrill of a new and strange emotion about mountain scenery. Whether the poetry was old, or the product of last century, it describes, as none other does, the desolation of dusky moors, the solemn brooding of the mists on the mountains, the occasional looking through them of sun by day, of moon and stars by night, the gloom of

dark cloudy Bens or cairns, with flashing cataracts, the ocean with its storms as it breaks on the West Highland shores or on the headlands of the Hebrides. Wordsworth, though an unbeliever in Ossian, felt that the fit dwelling for his spirit was

> "Where rocks are rudely heaped and rent
> As by a spirit turbulent,
> Where sights are rough and sounds are wild
> And everything unreconciled,
> In some complaining dim retreat,
> For fear and melancholy meet."

And such are the scenes which the Ossianic poetry mainly dwells on. Here is a description of a battle —

> "As hundred winds 'mid oaks of great mountains,
> As hundred torrents from lofty hills,
> As clouds in darkness rushing on,
> As the great ocean tumbling on the shore,
> So vast, so sounding, dark and stern,
> Met the fierce warriors on Lena.
> The shout of the host on the mountain height
> Was like thunder on a night of storms,
> When bursts the cloud on Cona of the glens,
> And thousand spirits wildly shriek
> On the waste whirlwind of the hills."

And yet, though this is the prevailing tone, it is broken at times by gleams of tender light —

> "Pleasing to me are the words of songs,
> Pleasing the tale of the time that is gone;
> Soothing as noiseless dew of morning mild,
> On the brake and knoll of roes,
> When slowly rises the sun
> On the silent flank of hoary Bens —

> The loch, unruffled, far away,
> Lies calm and blue on the floor of the glens." [1]

Whatever men may now think of them, there cannot be a doubt but these mountain monotones took the heart of Europe with a new emotion, and prepared it for that passion for mountains which has since possessed it.

Cowper, Burns, the Ballads, Ossian, all these had entered into the minds that were still young when this century opened, and added each a fresh element of feeling, and opened a new avenue of vision into the life of Nature. When the great earthquake of the Revolution had shaken men's souls to their centre, and brought up to the surface thoughts and aspirations for humanity never known till then, the deepened and expanded hearts of men opened themselves to receive Nature into them in a way they had never done before, and to love her with a new passion. But original as this impulse in the present century has been, we must not forget how much it owed, both in itself and in its manifold forms of expression, to the poetry of Nature which the eighteenth century bequeathed. Of that poetry there were two main streams, a literary and a popular. Of these the popular one was probably the most powerful in moulding the Poetry that was about to be.

[1] From Dr. Clerk's new translation of Ossian.

CHAPTER XIV.

WORDSWORTH AS AN INTERPRETER OF NATURE.

There are at least three distinct stages in men's attitude towards the external world. First comes the unconscious love of children — of those at least whose home is in the country — for all rural things, for birds and beasts, for the trees and the fields. The next stage is that of youth and early manhood, which commonly gets so absorbed in trade and business, politics, literature, or science, — that is, in the practical world of man, that the early caring for Nature disappears from the heart, perhaps never again to revisit it. The third and last stage is that of — some at least, perhaps of many — men, who, after much intercourse with the world, and after having, it may be, suffered in it, return to the calm, cool places of Nature, and find there a solace, a refreshment, something in harmony with their best thoughts, which they have not discovered in their youth, it may be because they then less needed it.

Something like this takes place in the history of the race. Not to mention the savage state, men in the primeval era, when history first finds them, are affected by the visible world around them

much as we see children and boys now are. Nature is almost everything to them. They use the forces, and receive the influences of it, if not in a wholly animal way, yet in a quite unconscious, unreflecting way. Then advancing civilization creates city life and affairs, in which man, with his material, social, and mental interests, takes the place of Nature, which then retires into the background. The love of it either wholly disappears or becomes a very subordinate matter. So it has been, so it still is, with whole populations, which know nothing beyond the purlieus of great cities. But probably the intensest feeling for Nature is that which is engendered out of the heart of the latest, perhaps over-refined, civilization. Ages that have been over-civilized turn away from their too highly-strung interests, their too feverish excitements, to find a peculiar relish in the calm, the coolness, the equability of Nature. Vinet has well said that "the more the soul has been cultivated by social intercourse, and especially the more it has suffered from it, the more, in short, society is disturbed and agonized, the more rich and profound Nature becomes, — mysteriously eloquent for the one who comes to her from out the ardent and tumultuous centre of civilization.

Towards the end of last century Europe had reached this third stage. In all the foremost nations it showed itself by this, as one among many new symptoms, that there was an awaken-

ing to the presence of Nature, and to the power of it, with an intimacy and vividness unknown before. Men became aware of the presence of the visible world, and, almost startled by it, they asked what it meant. What was so old and familiar came home to them as if it were now for the first time discovered. Here and there were men who, having had their fevered pulses stimulated almost to madness by the throes that preceded or accompanied the Revolution, turned instinctively to find repose in the eternal freshness that is in the outer world. This tendency showed itself in different ways in different countries, and expressed itself variously, according to the nature of the men who were the organs of it. In France this new passion for Nature found a representative in Rousseau, as early as 1759, in whose writings, in spite of their mawkish sentiment, their morbid "self-torturing," their false politics and distorted morality, all men of taste have felt the fascination of their eloquence and the picturesqueness with which the shores of the Leman Lake are described. Later in the century, Goethe, in Germany, expressed the same feeling with all the difference there is between the Teutonic and the Gallic genius. More than any poet before him, or any since, he combined the scientific with the poetic view of Nature, or rather he studied the facts and laws of Nature with the eye of a physicist, and saw the beauty that is in these with the eye of a poet. It has been said of him

that he worshiped God in Nature. It would be more true to say, that perceiving intelligently the unity that pervades all things, he felt intensely the beauty of that unity, he delighted in the wide views of the Universe which science had recently unfolded. But as the moral side of things, as duty and self-surrender hardly entered into his thoughts, it is misleading to speak of merely scientific contemplation and æsthetic delight as worship or devotion. Worship implies a personal relation to a personal being, and this was hardly in Goethe's thoughts at all. But whatever may be the true account of his ultimate views, he is the German representative of the great wave of feeling of which I speak.

It was a fortunate thing for England that when the time had come when she was to open and expand her heart towards Nature, as she had never before done, the function of leading the new movement and of expressing it was committed to a soul like Wordsworth's, — a soul in which sensibility, far healthier than that of Rousseau, and deeper than that of Goethe, was based on a moral nature, simple, solid, profound. It is the way in all great changes of every kind. When the change is to come, the man who is by his nature predestined to make it comes too. So it was in history and in art. Contemporary with Wordsworth's movement, a change in these was needed. Men ever since the Reformation had got so absorbed in the new order of things, that they

had quite forgotten the old, and had become ignorant of and unsympathetic to the past. So history, art, architecture, and many other things, had become meagre and starved. Men's minds, in this country at least, had to be made aware that there had lived brave men before Cromwell, good men before Luther and Knox. And Walter Scott was born into the world to teach it this lesson, and to let in the sympathies of men in full tide on the buried centuries. The change which Scott wrought in men's way of apprehending history was not greater than that which Wordsworth wrought in their feelings towards the world of Nature, with which, not less than with the world of History, their lives are encompassed. If Scott taught men to look with other eyes on the characters of the past, Wordsworth not the less taught them to do the same towards the present earth around them, and the heavens above them. This was indeed but half of Wordsworth's function. For he had moral truth to communicate to his generation, not less than naturalistic truth. It is, however, with the latter order of truth that we have now to do. Yet in him each kind of truth was so interpenetrated with the other, they were balanced in such harmony, that it is not possible in any study of him to dissever them.

Thus it seems that two poets were the chief agents in letting in on men's minds two great bodies of sentiment, the one historical, the other naturalistic, which have leavened all modern

society, and even visibly changed the outward face of things. Sir W. Stirling Maxwell, at the Scott Centenary, remarked that the mention of any spot by Scott, in his poems or romances, has increased the market value of the surrounding acres more than the highest farming could do. And there is not an inn or small farm-house in all the Lake country which does not reap every summer in hard coin the results of Wordsworth's poetry. Can even the stoutest utilitarian, seeing these things, say that Poetry is mere sentimental moonshine, with no power on men's lives and actions?

To understand what Wordsworth did as an interpreter of Nature, we must bear in mind the experience through which he passed, the natural gifts and the mental discipline which fitted him to be so. He was sprung from a hardy North of England stock that had lived for generations in Yorkshire, afterwards in Cumberland, in a social place intermediate between the squires and the yeomen, and from both his parents he had received the inheritance of a moral nature that was healthy, frugal, and robust. Early left an orphan, with three brothers and one sole sister, his childish recollections attached themselves rather to school than to home. At the age of eight he went with his brothers to Hawkshead, "an antique village, standing a little way to the west of Windermere, on its own lake of Esthwaite, and possessing an ancient and once famous grammar

school." There he boarded with a humble village dame, and attended the school by day; but it was a school in which our modern high-pressure system was unknown, and which left the boys ample leisure to wander late and early by the lake-margins, through the copses, and on the mountain-sides. Of the village dame under whose roof he lodged he has left a pleasing portrait in "The Prelude." The early and not the least beautiful part of that poem, and many of his most delightful shorter poems, refer to things seen and felt at that time. For, as the late Arthur Clough has truly said, "it was then and there beyond a doubt, that the substantive Wordsworth was formed; it was then and there that the tall rock and sounding cataract haunted him like a passion, and that his genius and whole being united and identified itself with external Nature." From this primitive village school, he passed like other north-country lads, to Cambridge, where he spent three years, the least profitable years of his life, if any years are unprofitable to a man like him. More profit he got from summer visits to his own country, Hawkshead, and his mother's relations, and especially from a walking tour through France, Switzerland, and the Italian lakes, — regions then but little trod by Englishmen. After graduating at Cambridge he gladly left it in 1791 to plunge headlong into the first fervor of the French Revolution.

The high hopes which that event awoke in him,

as in many another enthusiast, the dreams that a new era was about to dawn on down-trodden man, these things are an oft-told tale. When the revolutionary frenzy culminated in bloodshed and the Reign of Terror, Wordsworth's faith in it remained for long unshaken and unchanged. On the scenes which appalled others he looked undismayed, and even seriously pondered himself becoming a leader in the business. Luckily for himself and the world, he was recalled from France towards the close of 1792 by some stern home-measures, probably the cutting short of his always scanty supplies. In 1793 he published an "Apology for the French Revolution," in which he rails against all the most cherished institutions of England, and recommends the Utopia of absolute democracy as the one remedy for all the ills which afflict the world. Not even the murder of Louis XVI., nor the bloodshed and horrors which followed, shook him. The fall of Robespierre in July, 1794, gave him new heart to believe that his golden dreams would yet be realized. But when from the struggle he saw emerge, not freedom, peace, and universal brotherhood, but the First Consul with his armies, his high hopes at last gave way. Despairing of the destinies of mankind, he wandered about the country aimless, dejected, almost in despondency. Public affairs never appear so dark as when a man's own private affairs are getting desperate. And such was Wordsworth's case at that time. He had no pro-

fession, no aim in life, was almost entirely destitute of funds. From absolute want he was relieved in 1795 by the bequest of nine hundred pounds left to him by his friend Raisley Calvert. This enabled his sister — a soul hardly less gifted, and altogether as noble as himself — from whom he had been much separated, to take up house with him, and to minister not only to his bodily but much more to his mental needs. Seeing that his office on earth was to be a poet, she turned him away from brooding over dark social and moral problems, and led him to look once more on the open face of Nature, and to mingle familiarly with humble men. They made themselves a home, first in Dorsetshire, then in Somersetshire, where Coleridge joined them. Then it was that, warmed by the society of his sister and his poet friend, and wandering freely among the hills of Quantock, the fountain of his poetic heart was opened, which was to flow on for years. Soon followed the final settlement, in the last days of last century, in the small cottage at the Townhead of Grasmere, which became their home for more than eight years, and will forever continue to be identified with the most splendid era of Wordsworth's genius. For it was during the years immediately preceding Grasmere, and during the eight Grasmere years, that he attained to embody in one poem after another the finest effluence of his spirit.

It was almost entirely at Grasmere, between

the years 1800 and 1805, that he composed "The Prelude," an autobiographic poem on the growth of his own mind. It is for the purpose of better understanding this poem that I have given the foregoing brief framework of the outward facts of Wordsworth's life on which "The Prelude" comments from within. The poem consists of fourteen books in blank verse, probably the most elaborate biographic poem ever composed. Readers of Lord Macaulay's Life may perhaps remember his remarks on it: "There are," he says, "the old raptures about mountains and cataracts; the old flimsy philosophy about the effects of scenery on the mind; the old crazy mystical metaphysics; the endless wildernesses of dull, flat, prosaic declamations interspersed." No one need be astonished at this estimate by Lord Macaulay. We see but as we feel. To him, being such as he was, it was not given to feel or to see the things which Wordsworth most cared for. No wonder, then, that to him the poem that spoke of these things was a weariness. Doubtless much may be said against such a subject for a poem — the growth of a poet's mind from childhood to maturity: much too against the execution, the sustained self-analysis, the prolixity of some parts, the verbosity and sometimes the vagueness of the language. But after making full deduction for all these things, it still remains a wonderful and unique poem, most instructive to those who will take the trouble required to master such a work.

If after a certain acquaintance with Wordsworth's better-known and more attractive poems, a person will but study "The Prelude," he will return to the other poems with a new insight into their meaning and their truth.

How highly Coleridge esteemed it those know who remember the poem in which he describes the impression made on himself by hearing Wordsworth read it aloud for the first time after its completion: —

> "An Orphic song indeed,
> A song divine, of high and passionate thoughts,
> To their own music chanted."

This poem, read to Coleridge in 1805, was not given to the world till July, 1850, a few months after the author's death. The reason why I shall now dwell on it at some length is because no other production of Wordsworth's gives us so deep and sustained a view of his feeling about Nature, and of the relation which he believed to exist between Nature and the soul of man.

In Wordsworth's mental history two periods are especially prominent. The first was his school-time at Hawkshead, by Esthwaite Lake, eight years in all. The second was the mental crisis through which he passed after his return from France till he settled with his sister in the south of England, and ultimately at Grasmere. The first was the spring-time of his soul — a fair spring-time, in which all the young impulses and intuitions were first awakened, when the colors

were laid in and deeply engrained into every fibre of his being. The second was the trial time, the crisis of his spirit, in which all his early impulses, impressions, intuitions, were brought out into distinct consciousness, questioned and tested — vindicated by reason, and embraced by will as his guiding principles for life — in which, as one may say, all that had hitherto existed inwardly in fluid vapor was gathered up, condensed, solidified into deliberate substance and permanent purpose.

A healthful, happy, blissful school-time was that which Wordsworth spent by Esthwaite Lake — natural, blameless, pure, as ever boy spent. School rules were few, discipline was light, school hours were short, and, these over, the boys were free to roam where they willed, far or near, high and low, early and late, sometimes far into the frosty starlight. Then it was that Nature first

> "Peopled his mind with forms sublime and fair,"

came to him like instincts unawares, as he went about his usual sports with his companions. Rowing on the lake, snaring woodcocks among the hill copses by night, skating by starlight on the frozen lake, climbing crags to harry the raven's nest, scudding on horseback over Furness Sands: —

> "From week to week, from month to month, we lived
> A round of tumult."

In all this there was not anything lackadaisical,

nor any maundering about Nature, but only the life you might expect in a hardy mountain-bred boy, with robust body and strong animal spirits. These things he shared with other boys. There was nothing special in them. But what was peculiar, eminently his own, was this — the feelings that sometimes came to him in the very midst of the wild hill sports — in the pauses of the boisterous games. There were times when, detached from his companions, alone in lonely places, he felt from within

> "Gleams like the flashing of a shield, the earth
> And common face of Nature spake to him
> Rememberable things."

During his later school years he tells us that he would walk alone under the quiet stars, and

> "Feel whate'er there is of power in sound
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form
> Or image unprofaned, and I would stand,
> In the night blackened with a coming storm,
> Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds,
> Thence did I drink the visionary power."

He speaks, too, of a morning when he had stolen forth before even the birds were astir,

> "And sate among the woods
> Alone upon some jutting eminence,
> At the first gleam of dawnlight, when the vale,
> Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.
> How shall I seek the origin? where find
> Faith in the marvelous things which then I felt?
> Oft in these moments such a holy calm

> Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
> Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
> Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
> A prospect in the mind."

These were his supreme moments of existence, when the vision first dawned upon his soul, when without knowing it he was baptized with an effluence from on high, consecrated to be the poet-priest of Nature's mysteries. The light that then came to him was in after years "the master-light of all his seeing," the fountain-head of his highest inspirations. From this was drawn that peculiar ethereal gleam which rests on his finest after productions — the ode to the Cuckoo, the poems on Matthew, Tintern Abbey, the Intimations of Immortality, and many another poem. Not that he knew in these accesses of soul what he was receiving. He felt them at the time, and passed on. Only long afterwards, when

> "The eagerness of infantine desire"

was over, in hours of tranquil thought, the remembrance of those bright moments recurred, with a sense of distance from his present self so remote, that

> "Often did he seem
> Two consciousnesses, conscious of himself,
> And of some other being."

The Prelude contains nothing more beautiful or instructive than the whole account of that Hawkshead school-time. It portrays the wonderful boyhood of a wonderful boy, though neither

he himself nor others then thought him the least wonderful. Reflecting on it long afterwards, Wordsworth saw, and every student of his poetry will see, that in that time lay the secret of his power, by the impulses then received his whole philosophy of life and of poetry was determined. Natural objects, he tells us, then came home to him primarily through the human affections and associations of which they are the outward framework, — just as the infant when he first comes to know sensible objects, learns to associate them with the interventions of the touch, the look, the tenderness of its mother. Gradually, even before school-time was past, Nature had come to have a meaning and an attraction for him, by herself, without the need of such intervening agents.

Further, he tells us, that while for him at that time each individual rock, tree, and flower, had an interest of its own, he came deeply to feel the great living whole which Nature is. All his thoughts, he says, were steeped in feeling.

> "I was only then
> Contented, when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still;
> O'er all that lost beyond the reach of thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye
> Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
> O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
> Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides
> Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
> And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not

> If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
> Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
> With every form of creature, as it looked
> Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
> Of adoration, with an eye of love."

"Towards the Uncreated," — the looking thitherward through both Nature and his own moral being, so as to find both based on one Divine order, witnessing to one Eternal Being, this is one of Wordsworth's deepest tendencies. This is his teaching in many forms, emphatically in the "Ode to Duty," of which, after recognizing duty as the law of his own being, he exclaims,

> "Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
> And the eternal heavens through thee are fresh and strong."

The passage last quoted from "The Prelude" has the same meaning, and testifies that from and through his communing with Nature he had learnt, even in boyhood, a true and real natural religion — had felt his soul come into contact with Him who is at once the author and upholder of Nature and of man. Not perhaps that, in his school days, he was fully aware of what he then learnt. He felt at the time, he learnt to know what he felt afterwards. At Cambridge, when surrounded by trivial and uncongenial interests, he became aware that he had brought with him from the mountains powers to counterwork these —

> "Independent solaces,
> Incumbencies more awful, visitings
> From the Upholder of the tranquil soul."

What then was the spiritual nutriment he had gathered from that boyhood passed in Nature's immediate presence? He had felt, and after reflection had made the feelings a rooted and habitual conviction, that the world without him, the thing we call Nature, is not a dead machine, but something all pervaded by a life — sometimes he calls it a soul; that this living Nature was a unity; that there was that in it which awoke in him feelings of calmness, awe, and tenderness; that this infinite life in Nature was not something which he attributed to Nature, but that it existed external to him, independent of his thoughts and feelings, and was in no way the creation of his own mind; that, though his faculties in nowise created those qualities in Nature, they might go forth and aspire towards them, and find support in them; that even when he was withdrawn from the presence of that Nature and these qualities, yet that they subsist quite independent of his perceptions of them. And the conviction that Nature there was living on all the same, whether he heeded her or not, imparted to his mind kindred calm and coolness, and fed it with thoughts of majesty. This, or something like it, is the conviction which he tries to express in "The Prelude." Those vague emotions, those visionary gleams which came to him in the happier moments of boyhood, before which the solid earth was all unsubstantialized and transfigured — these he held to be, though he could not prove it, inti-

mations coming to his soul direct from God. In one of these moments, a glorious summer morning, when he was spending a Cambridge vacation by the Lakes, he for the first time consciously felt himself to be a dedicated spirit, consecrated to truth and purity and high unworldly endeavor.

Again, the invisible voice that came to him through the visible universe was not in him, as has often been asserted, a Pantheistic conception. Almost in the same breath he speaks of

> "Nature's self, which is the breath of God,"

and

> "His pure word by miracle revealed."

He tells us that he held the speaking face of earth and heaven to be an organ of intercourse with man, —

> "Established by the sovereign intellect
> Who through that bodily image hath diffused,
> As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,
> A deathless spirit."

And again, he says that even if the earth was to be burnt up and to disappear,

> "Yet would the living Presence still subsist
> Victorious."

To assert this, whatever it may be, is not to preach Pantheism. It is only to make the earth not a mere piece of mechanism but a vital entity, and to regard it as in living and intimate relation with Him who made and upholds it, and speaks to man more or less distinctly through it.

I pass now to the second stage, the great turn-

ing point in Wordsworth's mental history, which lay between his residence in France and his settlement at Grasmere, that is, between the years 1793 and 1800.

The three years he had spent at Cambridge, from 1787 till the end of 1790, if they did nothing else for him, had begun to draw out his social feelings. The order of his interests had been this. In early boyhood animal activity and trivial pleasures had engrossed him. In due time these had retired, and, before school-time was over, Nature stood out preëminent, almost alone, in his affections. Up to his twenty-second year, man had been to him a quite subordinate object. What Cambridge began, residence in France had perfected, — his interest in man for his own sake, and in all the great problems, practical and speculative, connected with man. These problems, present, more or less, to every age, had by the revolutionary fervor been quickened into feverish intensity, and driven on to new and far-reaching issues. Smitten to the core with the contagion of the time, Wordsworth began to meditate feelingly on man, his sufferings, his artificial restraints, his aspirations, his destiny. He pondered long and deeply the questions of government, and the best forms of it, — of society, of morality and its grounds, of man's perfection and its possibility. Even when for a time under the Reign of Terror his immediate hopes from the Revolution faded, yet he did not cease to ponder

the questions which recent events had brought to the surface. The fall of Robespierre and his "atheist crew" revived his hopes. Though none of the public acts of France pleased him, yet his faith in the people was still strong; no external blunders, he believed, would take "life from the young Republic."

For a while he dreamed on his golden dreams about a perfected humanity. Still for a time to him

> "The whole earth
> The beauty wore of promise." . .
> "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to the young was heaven."

But when Britain declared war against France, and France changed a war of self-defense for one of aggression, then came disgust with his own country, disappointment and vexation with France, despair of her promoting the cause of Liberty. Still he clung stubbornly to his old tenets, and even strained them farther. At last, when he saw the Emperor crowned by the Pope, this was too much for him. It was the last opprobrium, the final blow to his republican ardor. He had seen a people from whom he hoped all things, a nation which erewhile had looked up in faith to heaven for manna, take a lesson from the dog returning to his vomit. Then for a time the whole fabric of his hope and faith gave way. He fell into distrust, not only of nations, but of himself. The faiths, intuitions, aspirations which he had hitherto lived by, failed him. He cross-

questioned all fundamental principles, and if they could not vindicate themselves by formal proof, rejected them. At last, losing all hold on conviction, wearied out with endless perplexities, he doubted all moral truth, and gave it up in despair. With his hopes for man, and his faith in man's destiny, the poetic vision of Nature, which had hitherto been with him, disappeared, and his immediate converse with Him who through Nature spoke to him was for a time eclipsed. Under the tyranny of the logical and analyzing faculty, his intelligence was no longer an organ which transmitted clearly the light from without to the light within him, but, entangled in the meshes of the finite understanding, he could for a time see or receive nothing which he could not verify by logic. He looked on the outer world no more in a free imaginative way as of old, but compared scene with scene, and judged and criticised them by artificial rules.

> "To the moods
> Of time and season, to the moral power,
> The affections and the spirit of the place
> Insensible."

This to one like Wordsworth, more than to most men, was abnegation of his higher self, was in fact moral death. It was the lowest depth into which he sank, the climax of what he himself calls "his degradation."

But as his faith in man and his love of Nature had suffered shipwreck together, it was by the

same influence they were restored. From the temporary obscuration of the master vision, the laying asleep of his inner faculties, the first thing to arouse him was the influence of human affection, and that came to him through the presence of his sister, his "sole sister." When after his return from France he was wandering about aimless and dejected, she saw and understood his mental malady. She made a home for him, and became his hourly companion. If he had labored zealously to cut off his heart from all the sources of his former strength, she by her influence and sympathy maintained for him, as he expresses it, "a saving intercourse with his true self." She saw that his true vocation was to be a poet, and a teacher of men through poetry, and bade him seek in that alone "his office upon earth." She took him once more to lonely and beautiful places, till Nature again found access to him, and, combining with his sister's human ministry,

> "Led him back
> To those sweet counsels between head and heart,
> Whence groweth genuine knowledge fraught with peace."

Thus began that sanative process which in time restored him to his true self, to "his natural graciousness of mind," and made him that blessing to the world he was destined to become.

But there was not a restoration only, but there came through that same sister an accession of new emotions, an opening of his heart to influences heretofore disregarded. His nature was orig-

inally, he tells us, somewhat austere and unbending. She opened his eyes to perceive in Nature minute lovelinesses formerly unnoticed, his heart to feel sympathies and tendernesses for human things hitherto uncared for. In her company, whether they wandered about the country or dwelt in a settled home, his former delight in Nature returned. He felt once again, like the breath of spring, visitings of the imaginative power come to him; the overflowings of "the impassioned life" that is in Nature streamed in upon him, and he stood in her presence once more

"A sensitive being, a creative soul."

The restoration, the sanative process I speak of, showed itself in two directions, as regards his feeling towards man and towards Nature.

First as to man: his interests and sympathies, stimulated to excess by the political convulsions he had passed through, now found healthier objects in the laboring poor whom he conversed with in the fields, and in the vagrants he met on lonely roads. These became his daily schools. In many an exquisite poem he has embalmed the incidents and characters he saw or heard of at that time. His early upbringing combined with after experience and reflection to make him esteem simple and humble life more than artificial. The homely ways of the people he had spent his boyhood with — village dames, hardy dalesmen and shepherds — concurred with his own native

bias to make him love and esteem what is permanent, not what is accidental in human life, the inner, not the outer man of men, the essential soul, not its trappings of birth, fortune, and position. This native bias had been deepened by all he had seen, felt, and thought during the revolutionary ferment, and now became the fixed habit and purpose of his mind, part of his permanent self. For in humble men, when not wholly crushed or hardened by penury, he seemed to see the primary passions and elementary feelings of human nature existing as it were in their native bed — freer, stronger, more unalloyed than in men of so-called position and education, who, as he thought, were often overlaid by artifice and conventionality. The formalities which pass by the name of education he thought have little to do with real feeling and just sense, and intercourse with the talking world does little to improve men. He therefore turned away from artificial to natural man, and resolved to let the world know what he had seen and found in men and women whose outside was least attractive.

> "Of these, said I, shall be my song, of these
> Will I record the praises, making verse;
> Deal boldly with substantial things, in truth
> And sanctity of passion, speak of these
> That justice may be done, obeisance paid
> Where it is due."

Much more might be said of his views of man, as they ultimately became, for his insight into the heart and its workings, though confined to

certain lines, and reflective, not dramatic, was within these lines true and deep.

But we must now turn to consider, secondly, what were his views about Nature, when they were fully matured. He now came to hold with conscious conviction, what formerly he had only felt, hardly knowing that he felt it, that Nature had

A self-subsistence, existing outside of man's thoughts and feelings, and wholly independent of them;

A unity of life and power pervading it through all its parts, and binding them together into a living whole;

A true life of her own, which streamed through and stimulated his life — a spirit which, itself invisible, spoke through visible things to his spirit.

That this life had qualities inherent in it: —

Calmness, which stilled and refreshed man;

Sublimity, which raised him to noble and majestic thoughts;

Tenderness, which, while stirring in the largest and loftiest things, condescends to the lowest, is with the humblest worm and weed as much as in the great movements of the elements and of the stars.

Above all, Nature he now saw to be the shape and image of right reason, reason in the highest sense, embodied and made visible in order, in stability, in conformity to eternal law. The perception of these satisfied his intellect, calmed and soothed his heart.

Thus the powers and impulses which converse with these qualities, as they exist in the external work, had quickened within his boyish mind, now once more in this reviving time asserted themselves, and filled him with a happiness which, if soberer, was sanctioned by his mature reason. The Universe therefore was to him no mere reverberation of his own voice, no mere reflection of hues cast from his own changeful moods. It was not a thing to practice the pathetic fallacy on. It was not true that, as Coleridge dreamed,

"Ours is the wedding garment, ours the shroud."

Not this at all, but an existence independent of us and our moods, stable, equable, serene. And our wisdom is to receive her native impulses without imposing on her our caprices. Hence it is that Nature is to man a supporting, calming, cooling, and invigorating power. So it was that at this time he felt both emotion and calmness come to him from Nature, from the one energy to seek the truth, from the other that happy stillness which fits the mind to receive truth when it comes unsought. With clearer conviction than ever, he now saw in Nature a power, which is the shape and image of right reason — reason, in its highest sense, embodied and made visible. The order, the stability, "the calm obedience to eternal law," — these, as I have just said, which are the image of right reason, satisfied his intellect, calmed and soothed his feelings. From Nature's calmness, and from her slow and

steadily-working processes, he received an admonition to cease from hoping to see man regenerated by sudden and violent convulsions, and yet to esteem and reverence what is permanent in human affection, and in man's moral being, and to build his hope on the gradual expansion and purification of these. All these perceptions about Nature had been more or less present to him from boyhood, only now what were before but vague emotions came out as settled convictions.

But there was a further step, which he now made. He discovered that in order to attain the highest and truest vision of Nature, the soul of man must not be altogether passive, but must act along with and in unison with Nature, must send from itself abroad an emanation, which, meeting with natural objects, produces something better than either the soul itself or Nature by herself could generate. This creation is, as has been observed, "partly given by the object, partly by the poet's mind," is neither wholly mind, nor wholly object, but something, call it aspect, effluence, emanation, which partakes of both. It is the meeting or marriage of the life that is in the soul with the life that is in the Universe, which two are akin to each other, that produces the truest vision and the highest poetry. This view Wordsworth illustrates by the marvelous effect produced on a landscape by a change in the atmosphere, a clearing of the clouds, a sudden flood of moonlight let down into the dark-

ness of mountain abysses, such as that he saw at midnight while ascending Snowdon. A like power he thinks the mind can exercise on outward things — what he calls

> "An ennobling interchange
> Of action from without and from within.
> The excellence, pure function, and best power,
> Both of the object seen and eye that sees."

When his mind thus put forth its higher power on the actual familiar world, on life's every-day appearances, he seemed to gain clear sight of a new world, not hitherto reflected in books, but worthy to be so reflected, and made visible to other eyes. This he set himself to accomplish, and the result still lives in many a pure and deathless creation. That combined action of the object seen and of the eye that saw, above spoken of, is especially embodied in such poems as "The Yew-Trees of Borrowdale," "Stepping Westward," "The Leech-Gatherer," and "To the Cuckoo." In all these, and many more, the poet, letting his own spirit pass forth into the scene before him, and become identified with it, has caught the inner spirit of the place and of the hour, brought it out, and interpreted it as no mere outward description could have done. A few strokes, giving one or two of the most characteristic features, as seen by a keenly-observant eye, and then he glides into that which no eye can see, but only the living power of a deep and sympathetic imagination. And though few other

imaginations could have penetrated so deeply into the secret of Nature, and given articulate voice to her silences, yet every true imagination feels at once that he had gone to the quick, and truly rendered the invisible but not unfelt presence that dwells there. It is in this way that he has gathered up into himself the sleep that from oldest time has brooded over those Westmoreland mountains, and uttered it in his own perfect and melodious language. This has been done by him for that region once for all, and no other poet need attempt to repeat it, any more than a sculptor need essay another Apollo Belvedere, or a painter a new Transfiguration.

On many of the poems descriptive of Nature that followed his recovery from despondency, — that is, those composed between the years 1796 and 1808, — there rests an ethereal gleam, something of

"The light that never was on sea or land,"

which gives to these a peculiar charm, but which is less present in his later productions. This idealizing light was drawn either from remembrances of that dream-like vividness and splendor above noticed, which in childhood he saw resting on all things, or from occasional returns of the same vivid emotion and quick flashings from within, which his restored happiness in Nature for a time brought back. This peculiar light culminates in the "Ode on Immortality," though there it is rather a remembrance of something

gone than a present possession. Perhaps the last powerful recurrence of this visionary gleam which he felt is that recorded in the lines composed upon "An Evening of Extraordinary Beauty and Splendor," seen from the little mount in front of his Rydal home in the year 1818.[1]

But these high instincts, and all the impulses akin to them, what are they, what is their worth and meaning, what are we to think about them? Are they merely erratic flashes, garnishing for a moment our sky in early years, soon to be lost forever in the gray light of common day? This is the way in which most poets have regarded them, and so they have sung many a sad depressing strain over the vanished illusions of youth. But this was not the way with Wordsworth. Mr. Leslie Stephens, in a recent essay of great value, has admirably pointed out how his whole philosophy is based on "the identity between the instincts of our childhood and our enlightened reason," and is busied with expounding the proc-

[1] How greatly to be desired is an edition of Wordsworth's entire works, in which the poems should be printed in the exact chronological order of their composition, along with those notes on them which the poet dictated late in life. Such an arrangement of them is absolutely essential to a right understanding of their meaning, and those who desire to attain such an understanding are obliged to make the chronological arrangement for themselves, at great trouble, and at best very imperfectly. The time when such an edition can be made, with the fullest means for accuracy, is fast passing, if it is not already past. Is there no hope that those in whose hands the thing lies will still render this great and much-needed service to the great poet's memory?

ess by which "our early intuitions may be transformed into settled principles of feeling and action." Those vague instincts, Wordsworth believed, come to man from a divine source, and are given to him not merely for pleasure's sake, but that he may condense them into permanent principles by thought, by the faithful exercise of the affections, by contemplation of Nature, and by high resolve. The outer world was best and most truly seen when viewed, not as a solitary existence apart from man, but as the background of human life, and looked at through the human emotions of awe, reverence, and love. Thus, though those early ideal lights might disappear, something else, as precious and more permanent, would be wrought into character as the vague emotions became transmuted into what he calls "intellectual love;" "feeling intellect," "hopeful reason," all of which are but different names for that state of consciousness which he held to be the organ or eye that sees all highest truth.

> "This spiritual love acts not nor exists
> Without imagination, which, in truth,
> Is but another name for absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And reason in her most exalted mood."

It may be said, perhaps, This philosophy is all well enough for those who have in childhood known such ideal experiences in the presence of Nature. But these are the few; most men know

nothing of them. Be it so. But to these, too, this philosophy has a word to speak. If the many have been insensible to Nature, most surely they have known the first home affections, to father and mother, to brother and sister. In early youth they have felt the warm glow of friendship, and later in life the first domestic affections may have revived more deeply when manhood has made for itself a second home. Of these emotions time must needs make many of them past experiences. Are they then to be no more than fond memories without influence on our present selves? Wordsworth teaches, and all wise men agree with him, that if we allow these to pass from us, as sunbeams from a hill-side, the character is lowered and worsened; if they are retained in thought and melted into our being, they become the most fruitful sources of ennobled character. The firm purpose not to

> "Break faith with those whom he has laid
> In earth's dark chambers,"

— to how many a man has this become the chief incentive to perseverance in high endeavor!

This is a philosophy which will wear. It suits not only the visionary in his solitude, but is fitted as well for the counting-house and the market-place.

Again, it may be said, This way of looking at Nature and life may suit a man in the heyday of life, when his nerves are strong, his hopes high,

and all things wear their summer mood. In such a time he may well sing

> "Naught shall prevail against us or disturb
> Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings."

No doubt, through "The Prelude," and through all Wordsworth's poetry contemporary with it, that is, all his poetry composed before the age of thirty-five, there runs a vein of Optimism. But a man's views of life are not complete at that age. Though he never expressly recanted any of the views expressed in "The Prelude," yet he added to them new elements when time and grief showed him other sides of life. Hitherto, human sorrow had been to him but a "still sad music" far away. But when, in 1805, Nature, with her night and tempest, drove his favorite brother's ship on the Shambles of Portland Head, and wrecked the life he greatly loved, then he learned that she was not always serene, but could be stern and cruel. Then sorrow came home to him, and entered into his inmost soul. In that bereavement we find him writing — "Why have we sympathies that make the best of us afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the Supreme Governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence, differ so widely from what appears to be his notion and rule, if everything were to end here? Would it not be blasphemous to say that

. . . . we have more of love in our nature than He has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it, except upon the supposition of another and a better world, I do not see." This is not the language of a pantheist, as he has been often called, nor of an optimist, one blind to the dark side of the world, as his poetry would sometimes make us fancy him. From that time on, the sights and sounds of Nature took to Wordsworth a soberer hue, a more solemn tone. The change of mood is grandly expressed in the "Elegiac Stanzas on a Picture of Peele Castle," where he says that he now could look no more on

> "A smiling sea, and be what I have been."

Yet he gives way to no weak or selfish lamentation, but sets himself to draw from the sorrow fortitude for himself, sympathy and tenderness for others: —

> "Then welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne;
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here; —
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

That is manly and health-giving sorrow. It was his happiness, more than of most men, to use all that came to him for the end it was meant for. Early ideal influences from Nature, the first home affections, sorrows of mature manhood — none of them were lost. All melted into him, and did their part in educating his heart to a more feeling and tender wisdom. But they could not have done this, they could not have so deepened and

purified him, had they not been received into a spirit based in firm faith on God, from whom all these things came, whose purpose for himself and others they subserved. This discipline of sorrow was increased when, a few years after the loss of his brother, he laid in Grasmere church-yard two infant children. Those trials of his home affections sank deep into him, — more and more humanized his spirit, and made him feel more distinctly the power of those Christian faiths which, though never denied by him, were present in his early poems rather as a latent atmosphere of sentiment than as expressed beliefs. It cannot be denied that in his pure, but perhaps too confident youth, the Naturalistic spirit, so to call it, is stronger in his poetry than the Christian. He expected more from the teaching of Nature, combined with the moral intuitions of his soul, than these in themselves, and unaided, can give. He did not enough see that man needs other supports than these for the trials he has to endure. This is not a matter of positive assertion or of positive denial, — rather of comparative emphasis and proportion. We may say that the Christian view of life and Nature does not at first receive the prominence which is its due. But under the pressure of sorrow, and the sense of his own weakness, he more and more turned to the Christian consolations. This change was a very gradual one, and he has left no direct record of it. Only it is perceptible here and there in his later

poems, and, what is most to our purpose, it colors the eye with which he looked on Nature. This cannot, perhaps, better be illustrated than by comparing two poems composed in the same region at an interval of thirty years. In 1803, in his buoyant youth, during an evening walk by the shores of Loch Katrine, with his face toward a glowing sunset, he composed the exquisite lines "Stepping Westward," in which the scene around him and a chance word addressed to him suggested

> "The thought
> Of traveling through the world that lay
> Before me in my endless way."

In the autumn of 1831, when he was in his sixty-second year, he again passed through the Trossachs, and this was the sentiment that then arose within him. It may, as he himself suggests, have been colored by the remembrance of his recent parting with Sir Walter Scott and the thought of his decay, but it is altogether in keeping with his own habitual mood at that time: —

> "There 's not a nook within this solemn Pass,
> But were an apt confessional for one
> Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
> That life is but a tale of morning grass
> Withered at eve. From scenes of art which chase
> That thought away, turn, and with watchful eyes
> Feed it, 'mid Nature's old felicities,
> Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass
> Untouched, unbreathed upon. Thrice happy quest,
> If from a golden perch of aspen spray
> (October's workmanship to rival May),
> The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast,

That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay,
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest."

There is another poem of the same date, 1831, which, though it is seldom quoted, shall be given here in full, since it well illustrates Wordsworth's later phase of feeling about natural objects. It is entitled "The Primrose of the Rock," and refers to a rock which stands on the right hand, a little way up the middle road leading from Rydal to Grasmere: —

"A Rock there is whose homely front
The passing traveler slights;
Yet there the glow-worms hang their lamps,
Like stars, at various heights;
And one coy Primrose to that Rock
The vernal breeze invites.

"What hideous warfare hath been waged,
What kingdoms overthrown,
Since first I spied that Primrose-tuft,
And marked it for my own;
A lasting link in Nature's chain
From highest heaven let down!

"The flowers, still faithful to the stems,
Their fellowship renew;
These stems are faithful to the root
That worketh out of view;
And to the rock the root adheres
In every fibre true.

"Close clings to earth the living rock
Though threatening still to fall;
The earth is constant to her sphere;
And God upholds them all:
So blooms this lonely Plant, nor fears
Her annual funeral

"Here closed the meditative strain,
But air breathed soft that day,
The hoary mountain-heights were cheered,
The sunny vale looked gay,
And to the Primrose of the Rock
I gave this after-lay.

"I sang — Let myriads of bright flowers,
Like thee, in field and grove
Revive unenvied; mightier far,
Than tremblings that reprove
Our vernal tendencies to hope
Is God's redeeming love;

"That love which changed — for wan disease,
For sorrow that had bent
O'er hopeless dust — for withered age —
Their moral element,
And turned the thistles of a curse
To types beneficent.

"Sin-blighted though we are, we too,
The reasoning Sons of Men,
From our oblivious winter called
Shall rise, and breathe again,
And in eternal summer lose
Our threescore years and ten.

"To humbleness of hearts descends
This prescience from on high
The faith that elevates the just,
Before and when we die,
And makes each soul a separate heaven,
A court for Deity."

Is not this more in keeping with the whole of Nature, more true to human life in all its aspects, than poetry which dwells merely on the bright and cheerful side of things? If Nature has its

vernal freshness, and its "high midsummer pomps," has it not as well autumnal decay, bleakness of winter, and dreary visitations of blighting east wind? What are we to make of these? Are not suffering and death forever going on throughout animated creation? What meaning are we to attach to this? As for man, if he has his day of youth and strength and success, what are we to say of failure, disappointment, bereavement, and life's swift decay? This last, the dark and forlorn side of things, is as real as the bright side. How are we to interpret it? Surely, without attempting any theory which will explain it, nothing is more in keeping with these manifold and seemingly conflicting aspects of life than the faith that He who made and upholds the Universe does not keep coldly aloof, gazing from a distance on the sufferings of his creatures, but has himself entered into the conflict, has himself become the great Sufferer, the great Bearer of all wrong, and is working out for his creatures some better issue through a redemptive sorrow which is Divine. Such a faith, though it does not explain the ills of life, gives them another meaning, and helps men to bear them as no other can. This view of suffering, latent in much of Wordsworth's poetry, if not fully uttered, at last found full expression in these, which are among his latest lines.

No doubt this, and the few other meditative poems, composed in the same strain at that later

day, have not the magic charm, the ethereal beauty, of those songs sung in buoyant youth, when before the transfiguring power of his imagination the earth appeared to be

"An unsubstantial faery place."

That passed with youth, and could not return; but another sedater, more moralizing, yet sweetly gracious mood came on, — a mood which is in keeping with that earlier, its natural product representative in one, whose days and whose moods were as he himself wished them to be, "linked each to each by natural piety." As there is in character a grace that becomes every age, so there is a poetry. And Wordsworth's later expressions about Nature and life are, I venture to think, as becoming in an old man, matured by much experience and by sorrow, as his earlier more ideal poems became a young man just restored from a great mental crisis, but still with youth on his side. If the poems of the maturer age lost something that belonged to the earlier ones, they also gained new elements, — they contain words which are a support amid the stress of life, and a benediction for its decline.

There were many who knew Wordsworth's poetry well while he was still alive, who felt its power, and the new light which it threw on the material world. But though they half-guessed they did not fully know the secret of it. They got glimpses of part, but could not grasp the whole of the philosophy on which it was based.

But when, after his death, "The Prelude" was published, they were let into the secret, they saw the hidden foundations on which it rests, as they had never seen them before. The smaller poems were more beautiful, more delightful, but "The Prelude" revealed the secret of their beauty. It showed that all Wordsworth's impassioned feeling towards Nature was no mere fantastic dream, but based on sanity, on a most assured and reasonable philosophy. It was as though one who had been long gazing on some building grand and fair, admiring the vast sweep of its walls, and the strength of its battlements, without understanding their principle of coherence, were at length to be admitted inside by the master builder, and given a view of the whole plan from within, the principles of the architecture, and the hidden substructures on which it was built. This is what "The Prelude" does for the rest of Wordsworth's poetry.

For all his later phases of thought, all that followed the republicanism of "The Prelude," Wordsworth, I know, has been well abused. Shelley bemoaned him, Mr. Browning has flouted him, and following these all the smaller fry of Liberalism have snarled at his heels. But all his changes of thought are self-consistent, and if fairly judged, the good faith and wisdom of them all can well be justified. For a few years during the Revolution he had hoped for a sudden regeneration from that great catastrophe. He found

himself deceived, and gradually unlearnt the fallacies whence that deception had sprung. He ceased to look for the improvement of mankind from violent convulsions. Neither did he expect much from gradual political change, nor from those formalities which we nickname education, not from a revised code and payment by results, not from these nor from any outward machinery. But he hoped much from whatever helps forward the growth, the expanding, and the deepening, in all the grades of men, of the "feeling soul," by which they may become more sensitive to the face of Nature, more sensitive towards their fellow-men and the lower creatures, and more open to influences which are directly divine. In these things he believed, for these he wrought consistently, till his task was done.

I have dwelt thus fully on the growth of Wordsworth's character, the moral discipline through which he passed, and the ultimate maturity of soul to which he attained, in order that we may understand his doctrine regarding Nature. He held that it was only through the soul that the outer world is rightly apprehended — only when it is contemplated through the human emotions of admiration, awe, and love. This he held all his life through. But yet in his way of dealing with Nature, taken as a whole, we shall not be wrong if we note two different, though not conflicting, phases. In his earlier poetic period he was mainly absorbed in the unity and

large livingness of Nature — in feeling and interpreting the life that is in each individual thing, as well as in the whole, in substituting for a mere machine, — a universe of death, — one which

> "Moves with light, and light informed,
> Actual, divine, and true."

In doing this it is not too much to say that his poetry is the most powerful protest which English literature contains against the views of the world engendered by a mechanical deism — the best witness to the spiritual element that exists both in Nature and in man. Nor less is it our surest antidote to the exclusively analytic and microscopic view of Nature, so tyrannous over present thought, the end of which is universal disintegration. This was the work he did when he worked more in his earlier, what has been called, his naturalistic vein.

In his later period the moral tendency became predominant, not that it had ever been absent from his thought. Even at a comparatively early time he had been wont to take the sights and sounds of the sensible world as symbols and correspondences of the invisible. In 1806, hearing the cuckoo's voice echo from Nab-scar, as he walked on the opposite side of Rydal Mere, he exclaimed: —

> "Have not we too? yes, we have
> Answers and we know not whence;
> Echoes from beyond the grave,
> Recognized intelligence!

"Often as thy inward ear
Catches such rebounds, beware —
Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
For of God — of God they are."

Again, in that Evening ode composed in 1818, to which reference has been already made, as he gazes on

"The silent spectacle — the gleam —
The shadow — and the peace supreme,"

he exclaims —

"Come forth, ye drooping old men, look abroad,
And see to what fair countries ye are bound!"

In his latest phase, as seen in the two poems of 1831, quoted above, the moral has so overpowered the naturalistic mood that this spiritualizing of all Nature into symbols of things unseen is rather obviously obtruded than delicately hinted. However this may be, to do this, to treat Nature in this way, so to interpret it that it shall touch the moral heart of the most thoughtful and apprehensive men — this is one of the two highest functions of inspired Poetry. And in the exercise of this function, too, Wordsworth has taught us much.

It would be interesting to continue this investigation, and to trace the different phases of the great movement towards Nature, as it manifests itself in the poets who were Wordsworth's contemporaries, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott, and Keble; and in the poets of the present genera-

tion, and in other writers still living, who in prose works have treated of æsthetics. But to do so would require at least another volume. With Wordsworth, however, as the great leader of that movement, one may, with propriety, pause for the present. For however various and interesting have been the aspects of Nature that have been presented by his contemporaries, or by more recent poets, none of them has rendered those aspects he has essayed more truly, broadly, and penetratingly. And Wordsworth alone, adding the philosopher to the poet, has speculated widely and deeply on the relation in which Nature stands to the soul of man, and on the truths suggested by this relation. In that relation, and along the lines of thought that radiate from it, is to be found the true interpretation of Nature — that interpretation which man still craves, after Science has said its last word. This interpretation, however, is a truth which can only be apprehended by the moral imagination, that is, the imagination filled with moral light, and which will commend itself only to the most thoughtful men in their most feeling moods. It is not likely ever to be vindicated by logical processes, or tabulated in scientific registers. Not the less for that is it a vital truth, attesting itself, as all vital truths do, by the harmony it brings into all our thoughts, — by the response it finds in the inner man.

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